

Key Characteristics of Collaborative Leadership in Elementary Schools:

Understanding the Perceptions of Principals and Teachers

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Abstract**Key Characteristics of Collaborative Leadership in Elementary Schools:****Understanding the Perceptions of Principals and Teachers**

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Collaborative leadership is a process of leadership that allows all stakeholders to be actively involved in the decision-making process. This leadership process incorporates the perspectives and insight of the stakeholders in order to sustain effective change. The review of the literature expresses that leadership within the organization must have a strong understanding of need to create a culture built on respect, communication, and openness in order to implement this with fidelity.

Research suggests that collaborative leadership is an effective process to allow for open communication and empowerment within the organization. This qualitative research study investigated the perceptions that elementary school principals and teachers hold regarding the necessary characteristics of social interactions in a collaborative environment.

Through one-on-one interviews with two building principals and focus-group interviews with teachers in those same schools, the researcher found five common themes in what beliefs each respective group holds regarding the relational characteristics crucial for effective collaboration. These five themes of (a) caring, (b) generative listening, (c) nonjudgmental trust, (d) involvement, and (e) respect were consistent throughout all interviews. This research now provides elementary educators with a stronger understanding of what relationship characteristics are important to a collaborative environment. Educational leaders now have a deeper

understanding of how they can foster collaborative leadership environments within their elementary schools.

**The Dissertation Committee of Drexel University Certifies that this is the approved version
of the following dissertation:**

Key Characteristics of Collaborative Leadership in Elementary Schools:

Understanding the Perceptions of Principals and Teachers

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Dedication Page

This dissertation is first dedicated to my husband, Orion J. Vitale. From one of our first conversations, I expressed interest in obtaining my doctoral degree. Through the entire roller-coaster ride of a process, you offered me support, love, and guidance. I could never have accomplished this amazing task with you by my side. I am forever grateful for your support.

Secondly, I would like to dedicate this to my parents. My late father, Al Conforti, was a driving inspiration of working towards my doctoral degree. He taught me from a young age to always strive for the best and accept nothing less. My mother, Helen Conforti, taught me while striving for perfection, always ensure that I am in touch with the emotions and feelings of those around me. Together, this perfect pairing of parents created a collaborative leader without even recognizing it!

Thirdly, I dedicate this to my brother, Frank Conforti, his wife Kimberly Conforti, and his two beautiful children, Matthew and Kathryn. During this entire process, they provided me with a necessary balance to ensure that I was not solely focused on this process, but also living and enjoying family.

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this to all of my current and former colleagues and students. Together, as a team, we have been able to ensure that we always make decisions based on what is best for our students' academic and emotional success. My students and colleagues have enlightened me over my career of the importance of collaboration and understanding perspectives. My career thus far has been flooded with amazing faculty, staff, administrators, and mostly importantly students.

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I would like to thank Mercy Shemansky for making my vision come alive in an amazing graphic. Your artwork has significantly added to others being able to understand my study. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Cosmas Curry and Dr. Constance Lyttle for their guidance and expertise in educational research.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Education is an ever-changing entity where the requirements and accountability of educators is significant. Educational leaders need to utilize the most effective leadership strategies to keep their school moving in a positive direction, while having an encouraging, comfortable learning atmosphere for all. Leadership is crucial to student achievement. According to an extensive review of research conducted, “leadership is second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that influence student outcomes” (Council, 2008, p. 9). With the many responsibilities of evaluation, management, organizational and instructional leadership, coupled with the additional accountability measures placed on school leaders, they must ensure that they are incorporating effective and efficient leadership strategies (Heiftz, Linsky, & Graslow, 2009).

Collaborative leadership is a leadership process that can create a democratic environment where all stakeholders have ownership and accountability over the programs and initiatives within a school or district. The leader actively listens to all viewpoints and thoughts from each division of labor within the organization. According to the Leadership Development National Excellence Collaborative (2015), collaborative leadership is defined as, “a process in which people with different views and perspectives come together, set aside narrow self-interests, and discuss issues openly and supportively in an attempt to find ways of helping each other solve larger problems or achieve broader goals” (p. 1). The definition of collaboration can be broad. Interpretation of it generally contains personal / professional experiences. However, overall, collaboration is working together to obtain an achievable goal that will benefit the organization as a whole. Collaborative leadership can create an environment where the leaders are tapping

into creative thinking, pairing colleagues with complementary skill sets, and allowing stakeholders to work on projects they are passionate about (Crowe, 2003, p. 59).

Collaborative leadership needs to have five important components in order for it to be effective in making change (Fullan, 2001, Kotter, 2012, Puccio, Mance, & Murdock, 2011, Scharmer, 2009, Senge, 1990). Figure 1.1 is a visual representation created by the researcher to show how the five components work together to build a collaborative environment.

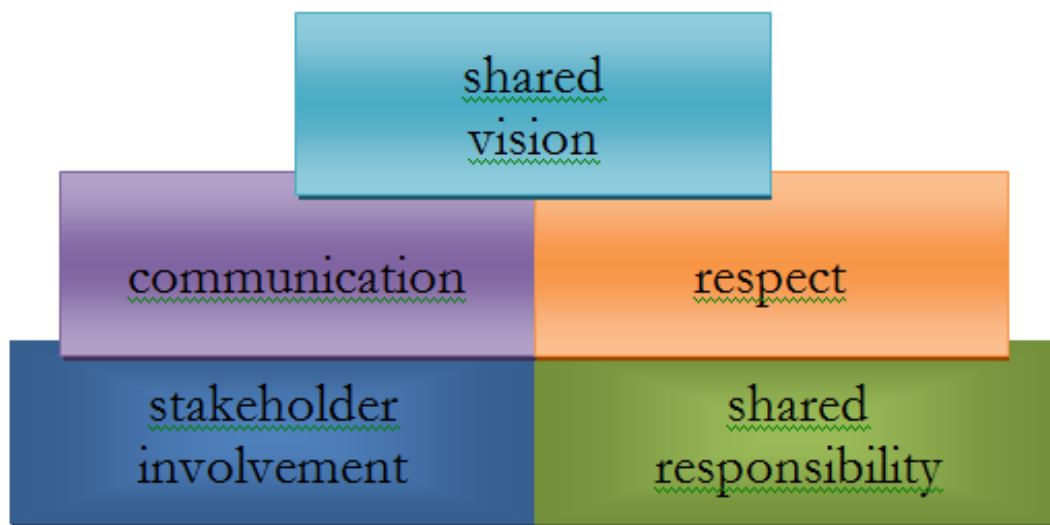


Figure 1.1: Building Blocks of Collaborative Leadership: These five blocks together build a collaborative leadership environment. They are built on one another and interdependent to create a shared vision for the organization. *Source: Vitale, 2016*

To begin the collaboration must be widespread across all employment levels. Each member of the organization has an important perspective and understanding of the needs within the organization. Thus, every viewpoint should be included in discussions. Secondly, the organization must have a common vision of where the organization needs to go in the future (Fullan, 2001). The vision should address the goals of that organization. Shared responsibility of the success of the organization is another integral component (Kotter, 2012). Without the team approach to making change, collaborative leadership cannot be effective. Within that team,

another component is a supportive culture built upon honesty and a mutual respect. The final and perhaps most important component is communication (Scharmer, 2009). The members of the organization must be able to clearly communicate their ideas in an open and trusting forum (Poff, 2010, & Gano-Phillips, Barnett, Kelsch, Mitchell, & Jonson, 2011).

When creating a collaborative leadership environment, the leaders must clearly define roles in the process or it can quickly become ineffective (Chreim, 2015). Leaders should be aware of the need to create a structured environment with roles and responsibilities for collaborative leadership where stakeholders can emerge as leaders in a safe, interactive setting (Chreim, 2015). A study conducted in the Emerging Leaders Program in Boston, Massachusetts, echoed the concept of creating a safe environment for idea sharing. The researchers reported that leaders should facilitate an environment that is safe and productive for the stakeholders to openly share their ideas, perceptions, and knowledge (Leigh, Shapiro, & Penny, 2010).

Senge (2012) describes schools as a system where all parts are interdependent on one another. He speaks of the importance of having a collaborative environment because, “teachers, administrators, and parents all bring some knowledge that the others lack” (Senge, 2012, p. 125). In systems thinking, it is crucial to understand the importance of each part of the system and how those parts impact the system as a whole. In doing so, collaboration is imperative to have insight into the perspectives of those working within the system (Senge, 2012).

Recognizing what perceptions and beliefs exist is a crucial element in best understanding how the system functions (Senge, 2012). The Iceberg Model, (see Figure 1.2) represents this need for understanding the mental models of a system (Senge, 2012). On the top of the water, the happenings and events of a system are easily observed. However, what is occurring under the water, allows for a better insight why behaviors exist, what influences those behaviors, and

the beliefs those within the organization hold. The Iceberg Model (Senge, 2012) offers a visual representation to highlight the need to investigate collaborative environments to understand how they function and the perceptions those within the system hold. At the surface level, there are the observable acts from individuals of how they collaborate. However, under the surface of the water, lies the perceptions, beliefs, and thoughts pertaining to collaboration. Going below the surface will allow the researcher to better understand the thought processes, feelings, and beliefs systems within the schools regarding how to foster a collaborative environment.

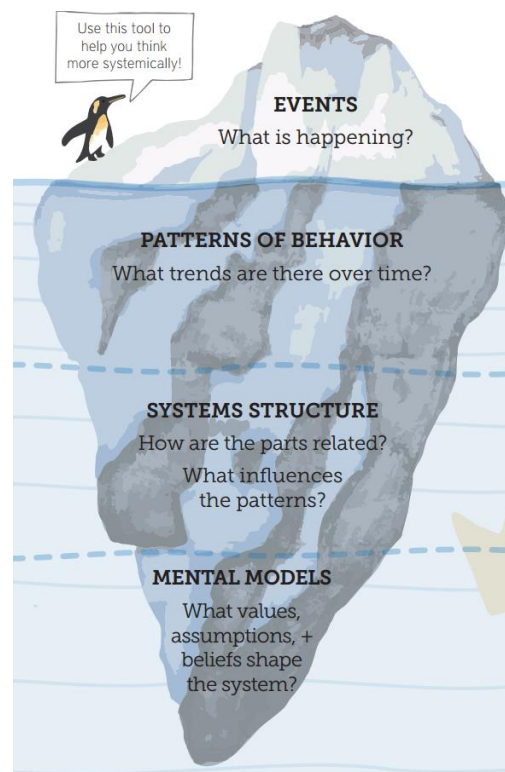


Figure 1.2: The Iceberg Model. (Donella, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

As outlined throughout the introduction, the process of collaborative leadership in education involves a system of leadership characteristics “about creating and cultivating the larger context - - the fertile common ground in which things can happen” (Scharmer, 2009, p. 73). The problem is that there needs to be an understanding of what both principals and teachers

perceive as the key characteristics of social interactions needed to facilitate a collaborative leadership system. Both principals and teachers must have the insight into how they view the social interactions in relationship to building a successful collaboration or “the web of collectively evolving relations” (Scharmer, 2009, p. 467).

With collaboration as a significant style of leadership, educators must understand what characteristics mold together to cultivate an effective leadership environment (Scharmer, 2009). The problem is that there needs to be an understanding of what both leaders and teachers perceive as the key characteristics needed for collaborative leadership. Both principals and teachers must have the insight into how the other views the characteristics of leadership for successful collaboration.

Purpose and Significance of the Problem

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of social interactions dealing with collaboration in an elementary school setting and the perceptions that principals and teachers hold about the collaborative leadership process. The research investigated the practical implementation of collaborative leadership. With that information, the research delved into what characteristics both principals and teachers feel are crucial for an effective collaborative leadership process.

Significance of the Problem

With an understanding of the importance of educating each child, coupled with the high-stakes leadership standards, educational leaders must master effective leadership styles and apply them to their school settings (Senge, 2000). The significance of this study is that it highlights the promise and challenges of collaborative leadership process in practice. This is important because

leaders must meet the expectations of their state-level department of education entities, central office, and community members. Leaders can learn from the perceptions their colleagues hold regarding the triumphs and challenges that exist with implementation of a collaborative leadership style.

Understanding the thinking and perceptions of those within the school is crucial to ensure a shared, common vision (Kotter, 2012). Scharmer (2009) in *Theory U* explores the importance of the four levels of listening. The first level deals with downloading the information shared through one's own judgments and opinions. The second level encompasses factual listening where the person is adding more information and perhaps breaking previous judgments. The third level concerns empathetic listening, where those involved in the dialogue are able to look at situations through one another's lens and perspective. The fourth and final level embodies generative listening where the listener leaves the conversation or discussion as a different person from the information shared. Through this research, the goal was to help principals and teachers reach the third and fourth levels of listening, the generative field, to ensure a strong understanding of their perspectives regarding the necessary traits of collaboration. This research will now assist elementary educators understand one another in regard to collaboration thus providing the best possible learning environment for students.

There has been much research conducted on the components of collaborative leadership and how it impacts schools through the lens of school improvement and achievement. This research study now contributes by changing the focus to how leadership incorporates and sustains relationships that foster a collaborative environment. The research focused on the perceptions teachers and principals hold regarding the social context needed for effective collaboration.

Perceptions of the leadership style were investigated to understand how the teachers view collaboration. This research contributes to a better understanding of how leaders can implement collaboration into their leadership for effective change and forward movement within the public school setting. As Covey (2004) would suggest, highly effective people first seek to understand and then to be understood. This research will now help those in elementary school settings understanding the contextual social interaction characteristics that both teachers and principals feel are necessary to foster a collaborative environment. The researcher took a deeper look at the perceptions that principals and teachers hold regarding the social interactions that are crucial for effective collaboration. Thus, this research enables each stakeholder group to better understand the perceptions of the whole.

Research Questions

While reviewing the literature and organizing the study, the following research questions were considered and answered through interviews:

1. **Central Question:** How does the principal establish relationships with the teachers to foster a collaborative environment within an elementary school setting in a school district located in Northeastern Pennsylvania?
 - a. *Sub-question 1:* What characteristics of social interactions do principals feel are important for an effective collaborative environment?
 - b. *Sub-question 2:* What characteristics of social interactions do teachers feel are important for an effective collaborative environment?

These questions address the gaps in the current research by offering a deeper understanding of how educational leaders incorporate collaboration into their leadership and the perceived

necessary characteristics of effective collaboration. This research gives better insight for educational leaders on how to employ collaboration most effectively.

The Conceptual Framework

Researcher Stances and Experiential Biases

As the researcher, I have a specific bias because of my experience as a building-level administrator. I have been a building-level principal for three years. Prior to that, I was an assistant principal for almost seven. During my tenure as an assistant principal, I worked with several different principals and superintendents who were each on the spectrum of collaboration. I vowed that when I was fortunate enough to lead my own school, I would create an atmosphere of respectful and productive collaboration.

As a Social Constructivist, I agree with Vygotsky's theory that social interactions and cognitive development are two married concepts that are interdependent (Berkley University, 2016 & Creswell, 2015). Working together, understanding one another, and thus learning from one another have all attributed to my personal and professional success. I believe that collaboration creates an environment where all feel ownership, thus we are all accountable for the education of our students. Through my research, I worked with school principals and teachers to better understand their social interactions and the impact those interactions have on collaboration. It is my belief, supported by the review of literature, that effective collaboration cannot occur without a positive school culture where teachers feel safe and comfortable to express their ideas.

Conceptual Framework

Through this research, collaborative research has been devised into three literature streams: (a) collaborative educational leadership, (b) collaborative leadership in practice, and (c)

the impacts of collaborative leadership in schools (see Figure 1.3). These three streams join together to offer a full picture of what embodies effective collaborative leadership. The researcher begins with the broad concept of educational leadership, digs deeper into the characteristics of collaborative leadership, and concludes with the impacts the collaboration has on a school setting (see Figure 1.3). The inner circle is this current research to better understand the perceptions held about the necessary social constructs for effective collaboration.

As 21st Century schools work to ensure they provide the most effective learning environments in an ever-emerging global society, the leadership works to set a vision (Kotter, 2012). This vision sets the tone and goals for how the school will move forward in the future. Collaborators (Kelley, 2005) work together, across job responsibilities, to ensure that those within a school are setting the vision, and the devising the plan for making change.

Collaborative leadership must be supported by effective communication (Fullan, 2001 & Scharmer, 2009) with all stakeholders. In a case study conducted on a collaborative theater production, those involved with the production expressed that they experienced more ownership over the show since they were involved in the planning and development (Kramer & Crespy, 2011). This perceptual feeling of value and ownership is supported by other empirical research studies that will be outlined in Chapter 2 (Butler, 2007 & Tesfaw, 2014).

In looking at schools that implement collaborative leadership, one school conducted a six-year longitudinal study on how their shared leadership assisted to improve assessment scores (Hauge & Vedoy, 2014). Research investigating the impact of collaboration has been conducted on a large scale looking at achievement data from almost 200 elementary schools (Hallinger & Heck, 2010) to reviewing Title I data from just nine elementary schools (Abbott & McKnight, 2010). The research all reinforces that these collaborative environments focused on teamwork

and communication to help make their academic gains. Research explored in the following chapter focusing on collaborative leadership highlights that it can have a positive impact on both achievement and school culture.

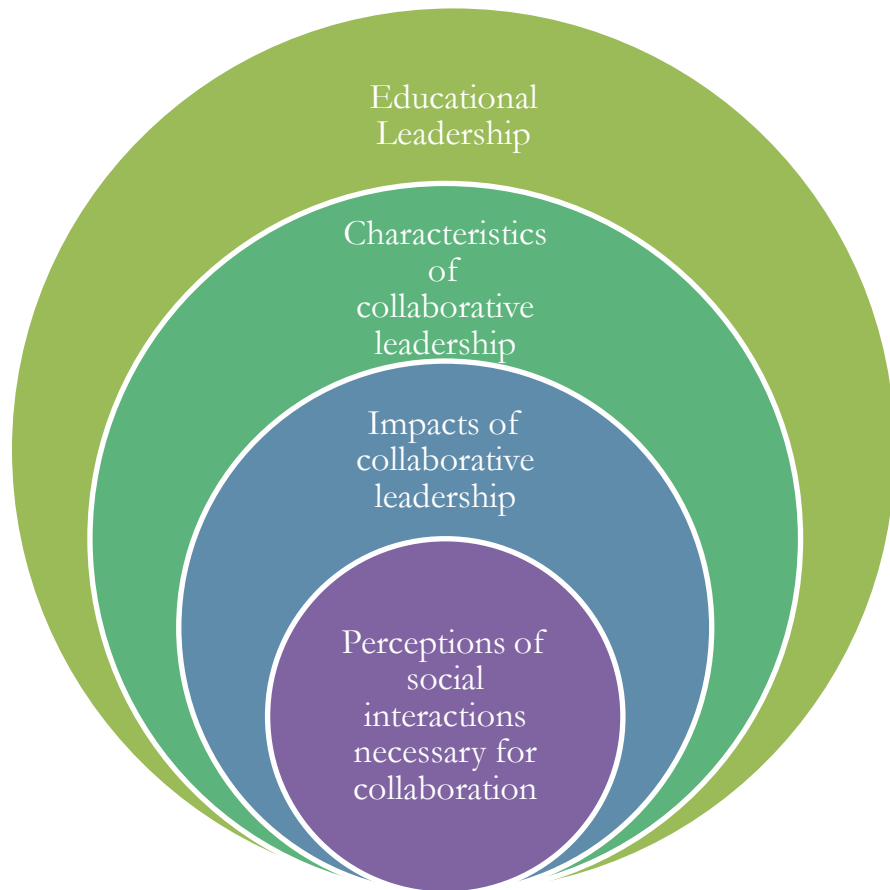


Figure 1.3: Conceptual Framework Circles

Definition of Terms

The following terms will assist the reader in understanding the terms used in this research study:

- Collaborative leadership: a process in which people with different views and perspectives come together, set aside narrow self-interests, and discuss issues openly and supportively in an attempt to find ways of helping each other solve larger problems or achieve broader goals. (Leadership Development National Excellence Collaborative, 2015, pg. 1).

- Distributive leadership: a system of practice comprised of a collection of interacting components: leaders, followers, and situation. These interacting components must be understood together because the system is more than the sum of the component parts or practices. (Spillane, 2014, pg. 150).
- Perceptions: the manner in which people understand another person or a situation (Merriam-Webster, 2016).
- School community: various individuals, groups, businesses, and institutions that are invested in the welfare and vitality of a public school and its community—i.e., the neighborhoods and municipalities served by the school (Hidden Curriculum, 2014).
- School culture: the perceptions and beliefs that stakeholders embody due to the written and unwritten procedures and policies of a school organization (Hidden Curriculum, 2014).
- Shared leadership: of governing a school by expanding the number of people involved in making important decisions related to the school's organization, operation, and academics (Hidden Curriculum, 2014).
- Stakeholders: anyone who is invested in the welfare and success of a school and its students, including administrators, teachers, staff members, students, parents, families, community members, local business leaders, and elected officials such as school board members, city councilors, and state representatives (Hidden Curriculum, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The basic assumption made in this research is that currently school leaders are following the expectations set forth by the Pennsylvania Department of Education by creating a collaborative environment. With the new principal effectiveness tool implemented in the 2014 –

2015 school year in the state of Pennsylvania, there is now a standard measure for evaluation of building administrators. There is an expectation of incorporating collaborative leadership within the principal effectiveness evaluation tool. This research is built on the assumption that these building-level administrators are working to meet these expectations by employing collaborative leadership. Both of these principals confirmed this assumption that they have integrated collaboration into their leadership style.

A limitation of this study could potentially be the sample size. The research focused on one school district within Northeastern Pennsylvania. Perhaps there are schools districts within other areas of the United States that have more collaboration because the explicit expectation from their state-level department of education has been in place longer. Collaborative leadership is built on the inclusion of all stakeholder groups. This research study focused only one of the stakeholder groups. Other stakeholder groups may have different perspectives of collaborative leadership.

There are several delimitations to this study. A delimitation is a choice that the researcher makes in a research study that could affect how the study is generalized or assessed (Simon, 2011). In this study, there are two delimitations. The first delimitation is that the focus of the study was on elementary schools only. This choice was made by the researcher because of the personal experience with the elementary setting. Elementary and secondary schools have different cultures within their schools so this study may not be able to be generalized in all school settings. The second delimitation is the choice in location. Two schools within one district were chosen which could potential limit the study. Although these schools have different building principals, the principals have the same set of expectations set forth by their

superintendent. Despite these delimitations, the researcher believes that this study offers a deeper insight in collaborative environments.

Summary

With the current culture and politics of education, many feel that educators are expected to do more with less funding. Collaboration can assist with this feeling of being overwhelmed with the expectations put upon the educational system. As Maddock (2011) from the Manchester School of Business explained, “Collaborative leadership can generate the relationships necessary to resolve tensions between rising expectations, smaller budgets, and more innovative solutions” (p. 40). Collaboration creates an atmosphere where all members of the organization should feel a part of a team working towards a common goal. Collaborative leadership can prevent the silo-effect, where stakeholders are isolated from planning, implementation, and review of initiatives (Goman, 2014).

The research investigated how elementary school leaders establish a collaborative leadership environment to continue to grow their schools. Sustainability is a large concern when making change. A school needs to plan for how to keep the school moving forward. When members of the school work together for a common goal, they are speaking the same language. This directly relates to system thinking. All aspects of the organization are represented and regarded as equal, integral parts of the system. Each has a voice because collectively the system functions because of each person. The school is all focused on the same target. As other problems or obstacles arise, the organization is well prepared because of the collaborative nature. They have already created those bonds and that relationship of working together as a team for the common good. Understanding how to create and sustain those bonds that foster a collaborative environment is the goal of this research study. Prior to investigating the perceptions of the

social context necessary for collaboration, it is imperative to understand the background of collaborative leadership. The following chapter will provide background information on why collaboration is an important part of leadership, how it is employed, and the effects that it has on school environments. This background information will provide a foundation for the need to investigate collaboration further.

Chapter 2

Introduction

The demands and expectations of school leaders continue to grow. The 21st Century educator is tasked with motivating students to learn and meet their greatest potential so that they can enter a competitive global economy. School leaders must work to create an environment focused on student achievement coupled with a positive school culture. Educational leaders must be able to focus their attention on implementing an effective leadership style that will be the most beneficial. As addressed in a review of empirical research regarding educational leadership, “Leaders who possess a single set of tools will find themselves bouncing around from success to failure without understanding why” (Hallinger, 2011, p. 137). Educational leaders must be adaptive and reflexive to the changing needs of students and the changing expectations from the state-level department of education.

Review of the Literature

This literature review will focus on three literature streams: (a) collaborative educational leadership, (b) collaborative leadership in practice, and (c) impacts of collaborative leadership within schools.

Collaborative Leadership									
Collaborative Leadership		Collaborative Leadership in Practice				Impacts of Collaborative Leadership in Schools			
Background & Theory	Literature on Collaborative Educational Leaders	Characteristics	Leading by Convening	Professional Learning Communities	Perceptions of Collaboration	Teacher Efficacy	Impact on Stakeholder Groups	School Improvement	Special Education
Bolden (2011)	Angelle (2007)	Wheatley (2010)	Cashman et. al (2014)	DuFour (2004)	Black (2010)	Daskas & White (2010)	Fusarelli, et. al (2011)	Hauge & Vedoy (2014)	DeMatthews (2013)
Kelley (2005)	Kotter (2012)	McAdams (2010)	Bald & Lawrence (2016)	Aufara (2012)	Butler (2007)	Johnson (2006)	Braser, Rich, & Ross (2010)	Hallinger & Heck (2010)	Feister (2006)
Senge (1990)	Gano-Phillips, et. al (2011)	Jappinen (2014)		DeMatthews (2014)	Tesfay (2014)	Sveiby & Simons (2002)	Bray, et. al (2014)	Abbott & McKnight (2010)	
Kotter (2012)	Fullan (2001)	Fullan (2001)		Barton & Stimpert (2012)	Padilla (2009)	Margolin (2012)		Dwyer, et. al (2012)	
Scharmer (2009)	Hallinger (2013)	Padilla (2009)		DeMatthews (2014)		Russell (2006)		Ohlson (2009)	
Puccio, Munoz, & Murdock (2011)	Nir & Hameiri (2013)	West (2010)		Linder, Post, & Calabrese (2012)		Fullan (2001)			
	Gkolia, et. al (2006)	Gano-Phillips, et. al (2011)		Ning, Lee, & Lee (2013)		Ohlson (2009)			
		Kramer & Cropp (2011)		Thomson & Cherrington (2014)					
				Almonite, Young, et. al (2013)					
				DeMatthews (2014b)					

Figure 2.1: A visual depiction of the current literature streams concerning collaborative leadership. The researcher created this to allow for a representation of the research themes.

Collaborative Educational Leadership

Background and theory. Collaborative leadership is not a new topic to the 21st Century. This model of leadership has been researched and discussed for decades. In a study conducted by Bolden (2011), he found that in the 1980's, collaborative leadership became a more serious topic of discussion. Every decade following that, research around collaborative leadership increased at rapid rates. Collaborative leadership became a major component in various other leadership theories.

In *Ten Faces of Innovation*, Kelley (2005) theorizes ten various personality characteristics that effective leaders of change hold. One of those characteristics is collaboration. A collaborator is able to identify the need to explore the expertise of those within the organization to make change in an effective manner. A collaborator motivates those within the organization to move away from working in segregated teams. This leader brings together those teams, or representatives, to share ideas and move the organization forward. A collaborator is able to instill confidence within the stakeholders by showing that their opinions and voices are important for improvement. A collaborator also sees the need to involve other organizations in this collaboration with that understanding that organizations are inter-dependent of one another. Thus, the planning and implementation of change should involve all stakeholders, both inside and outside of the organization.

Once the collaborator has brought together the stakeholders within the organization, this leader needs to identify and clearly communicate a shared vision (Senge, 1990). Kotter (2012) discusses the importance setting a vision so that the organization can move forward. In order to effectively set a vision, the leaders of a district must rely on lower-level leaders (i.e. teacher leaders, building administrations, department chairs) to create the sense of urgency and reduce

the feeling of complacency. Those lower-level leaders “need to create a change coalition, develop a guiding vision, sell that vision to others” (Kotter, 2012, p. 47). Kotter is suggesting that leadership must create a team that focuses on the necessary change within an organization, sets the vision, and then works to promote that vision so it is accomplished. Collaborative leadership allows for those within the organization to take on leadership roles in order to make change. They are not formal or supervisory positions; however, they are stakeholder leadership roles that are crucial to move an organization forward.

Throughout the process of collaboration, the leader and all stakeholders must demonstrate respectful communication. *Theory U*, a leadership book by Scharmer (2009) explores the need for collaboration and openness. Having open lines of communication allows stakeholders to listen to all perspectives. Strong collaborators are active listeners. Scharmer (2009) explains that there are four levels of listening. The first level, downloading, is when one listens and just re-confirms what they already know. There are preconceived notions that cause the listener to form judgments. The second level of listening is factual where the listener learns something from the discussion. These first two levels are the basic levels of listening that many engage in. The next two levels are crucial for collaboration. The third level is about empathetic listening where the listener forgets his / her own perception and understands the person through his / her eyes. This is more about understanding where the person is coming from and how that person is feeling. The last level is a more complex level of listening called generative. This is where the listener walks away from the conversation feeling different. The communication has changed the person. The person has let go of their notions and added a deeper, inner wisdom. For people to truly and sincerely dialogue with the goal of understanding one another, they must function on the higher two levels of Scharmer’s levels of listening. They must have an open heart, open will,

and open mind in order to gain a deeper understanding of the other person. This is the keystone of collaborative leadership. All members of the organization must have the ability to communicate openly, which leads to trust.

In conjunction with Scharmer's *Theory U* exploring the need of openness within communication, Puccio, Mance, and Murdock (2011) take this one step further in their *Creative Leadership*. This leadership theory focuses on the planning and implementation of change within an organization. One crucial aspect of planning is the ability to explore ideas. The authors suggest that brainstorming sessions should have a specific goal, but should be all inclusive of ideas. They suggest that leaders need to encourage all stakeholders to "play with ideas, explore possibilities, consider alternatives, and to remember that it's just an idea" (p. 173). Stakeholders are able to share their thoughts and suggestions in a non-threatening environment that welcomes all ideas. This level of collaboration allows for all members to have a voice in the planning stages of change.

There is much research to support the need for a collaborative environment. These leadership theorists explore the importance of collaboration and the rationale behind this leadership style. However, they do not discuss the practical application of collaborative leadership within a school setting. They discussed the importance of relationship building needed for collaborative leadership without delving into how those relationships are established. This research study will look further into effective ways that collaborative leadership is implemented in a school setting.

Literature on collaborative educational leaders. Public education leaders have to focus on many tasks during each school day. Leaders who collaborate "recognize that in today's schools, one person cannot adequately address the needs of all members of the school

community” (Angelle, 2007, p. 56). Leaders are challenged with constant societal changes in the 21st Century that cause them to alter their organization to best meet the needs of the students they educate. Research suggests that in order for any leadership style to be effective, the leader must create a sense of urgency (Kotter, 2012 & Gano-Phillips, Barnett, Kelsch, Mitchell, & Jonson, 2011). Stakeholders must have an understanding that the problems they are faced with must be addressed. Even high-achieving schools have the need for growth and. Leaders cannot allow for complacency.

In order to create this sense of urgency, the team must define their shared vision (Kotter, 2012). Once that is created, then the collaborative team must “engage others in the shared vision” (Angelle, 2007, p. 55). All stakeholders must clearly understand the shared vision and the need to create change to move the educational institution forward. Fullan (2001) suggests that this should be tackled through the instilling a moral purpose within the stakeholders. He defines that leadership is comprised of five traits:

- Moral purpose
- Understanding change
- Relationship building
- Knowledge creation and sharing
- Coherence making

A collaborative leadership style incorporates all five of these traits naturally in the involvement and interaction of all stakeholders.

Although there is concrete theory in the need for effective educational leadership and a wealth of research surrounding this topic (Hallinger, 2013), some still a question how leadership effectiveness and student achievement are linked. There is research to suggest that

this correlation is difficult to prove because of the many various organizational factors within a school setting (Nir & Hameiri, 2013 & Gkolia, Switzer, & Brundrett, 2006).

Collaborative Leadership in Practice

Collaborative leadership characteristics. Collaborative leadership has various components. To begin, it is about open and honest communication. Prior to the stage of effective communication, there needs to be a relationship between the colleagues. Colleagues need to understand one another, even on a personal level. Starting this collaborative environment can be simply with conversations between colleagues that involves mutual dialogue. All parties should have a voice during these informal discussions. As Margaret Wheatley (2010) once commented, “Human conversation is the most ancient and easiest way to cultivate change – personal change, community and organizational change, planetary change” (McAdams, 2010, pg. 24).

A crucial aspect of open communication is an environment built upon trust and respect. All stakeholders must know and respect the other person’s perspectives. Mutually respectful relationships must be created for this level of interaction (Jäppinen, 2014). These relationships then begin to build trust between the professional colleagues. Trust is a critical element of any leadership style, specifically collaborative leadership (Fullan, 2001 & Padilla, 2009). In an educational setting, this can be between the Superintendent and the administrator team and between the principal and the faculty / staff. Stakeholders need to develop these bonds so that all players respect one another and their differing viewpoints (West, 2011). In order to have an effective leadership team, they start by “building trust among team members and fostering a shared sense of program stewardship” (Gano-Phillips, Barnett, Kelsch, Mitchell, & Jonson, 2011, p. 67). The leader within the school has the responsibility to create and foster this

environment. The characteristics of collaborative leadership are well defined of what collaborative leadership should embody within an organization. There is a gap within the research reviewing the application of these theories. This research study will help leaders better understand how to build relationships with stakeholder groups in order to create an effective collaborative leadership environment.

In a study conducted by Kramer and Crespy (2011) at the University of Missouri, they reviewed the communication of a collaborative leadership style. This study was conducted through the theatrical performance. The data gathered was through ethnographic participant interviews. Although this is not a formalized education setting, much learning occurs in creating a theatrical performance. The director intentionally and explicitly communicated the need for collaboration and explained what his vision of that environment would look like. The members of the production then were interviewed two weeks following their final curtain call. The participants expressed the feeling of being invested in the production as well as the freedom to develop themselves. They commented that they were empowered over the ownership that they felt they had in this collaborative environment (Kramer & Crespy, 2011). This research explores how the stakeholders felt during this collaboration, but they do not discuss the culture of the environment.

Leading by convening. Leading by Convening (Cashman, et. all, 2014) is a process where educational leaders look to have authentic engagement. This authentic engagement has three prongs of (a) ensuring relevant participation from all stakeholder groups, (b) coalescing around issues, and (c) collaborating to solve problems (Cashman, et. all, 2014). The focus on this process is to have a partnership in the leadership roles. The Leading by Convening process allows stakeholders to share their perspectives of what the issues are within the school and then

they work collectively to devise solutions for those issues. This collaborative leadership process had three focus areas. The first focus is to ensure that the voices of various stakeholder groups (teachers, support personnel, administrators, parents, students, and community members) are valued. Secondly, there needs to be awareness of the human and logistical aspects of change. Thirdly, there needs to be a sustainable process where teachers become the experts in literacy and then in turn lead or mentor others within the school community.

There are many examples of how Leading by Convening has been effective to involve various stakeholder groups at looking collectively at issues. The Madison-Grant United School Corporation in Indiana devised a professional development goal to focus on literacy K-12 (Cashman, et. all, 2014). District leaders, faculty, and staff reviewed school data to better understand what additional profession development was needed. This small, rural school district decided that they needed more professional development in best practices and educational research in the appropriate scaffolding of skill instruction. Together, as a school community, they created a scope and sequence for student learning. This is just one example of how school stakeholders can collaborate best using the Leading by Convening process.

Professional learning communities. A common manner in which schools incorporate collaborative leadership is through professional learning communities (PLCs). PLCs are committees within a school where teachers are able to choose their committee and then even lead that committee. DuFour (2004) describes PLCs as having three main big ideas: (a) ensuring student learning, (b) creating a culture of collaboration, and (c) focusing on results. These three big ideas demonstrate that the collective team of teachers, staff, and administrators in a school are working towards a common goal of student learning by examining current process and achievement.

PLCs incorporate five key attributes: (a) shared vision, (b) supportive and collective leadership, (c) shared learning and the opportunity for application of that learning, (d) collaborative practice of peer observations, coaching, or mentoring, and (e) conditions that support the relationships and the structure of collaboration (Anfara, 2012).

PLCs are a way for “teachers to move beyond their classrooms and represent their work to colleagues, discuss, engage, and collectively grow” (DeMatthews, 2014a, p. 1). Teachers are able to collaborate with their colleagues in sharing best practices and spearheading initiatives throughout the school. There are seven recommendations that DeMatthews (2014a) makes for school administrators when creating PLCs. Administrators should do the following:

- Have a high level of interaction and visibility
- Identify the problems and then be responsible in a equitable manner
- Use school resources to support PLCs
- Reflect on any previous school change
- Ensure that the locations of PLCs are conducive to sharing of ideas
- Create a plan of what the committee chair should do with questions for administration if they are not present
- Understand that effective committees do not always equate to professional development

The planning of PLCs is crucial to ensure that they are effective avenues for collaboration, learning, and change.

PLCs can offer many benefits to a school setting, including the allowance for “educators to join forces to promote ongoing growth and improvement for themselves and their students” (Barton & Stepanek, 2012, p. 1). According to DeMatthews (2014c), PLCs offer four main

benefits to a school environment. Firstly, decisions are at a higher quality because all aspects of the situation are considered. The aspect of strong decision-making noted in DeMatthews (2014c) is echoed in other research. Research conducted through higher-education professional development sessions with K -12 educators; it was shown that PLCs, members develop a “sense of autonomy as a result of their decision-making capabilities within the groups” (Linder, Post, & Calabrese, 2012, p. 14).

Secondly, there is an increase of support for initiatives since stakeholders are the ones implementing the change (DeMatthews, 2014c). Ning, Lee, and Lee (2015) support DeMatthews (2014c) through their research showing that team collectivism is strengthened through PLCs. They allow for stronger collaboration and enhance the aspect of working towards a collective solution to the programs the organization faces (Ning, Lee, & Lee, 2015).

Thirdly, stakeholders report being more satisfied with their leadership since they are an active participant in the planning process. PLCs have the possibility of creating a culture of shared and supportive leadership (Thornton & Cherrington, 2014). Together, the collective unit works together in the decision-making process.

Lastly, stakeholders are able to take on leadership roles, tapping into the varied expertise of faculty and staff. In an article exploring school counselor PLCs, Antoinette-Young, Millard, and Miller-Kneale (2013) express that in this committee atmosphere, colleagues are able to “self-reflect, understand the concerns and interests of stakeholders, problem-solve issues, and diminish existing obstacles” (p. 265). In a school environment with PLCs, colleagues collectively work to improve services for students, with the ability to look from one another’s perspective.

In a research study conducted by DeMatthews (2014b), he explored how collaborative leadership occurs within PLCs. He conducted 35 – 60 minute interviews of various members of

school communities in six western Texas Elementary Schools. His research found that the characteristics incorporated in PLCs are collaboration, shared values, common responsibility for education of all students, focus on the school as a whole, and professional reflection. Through PLCs, the faculty is able to share their viewpoints and knowledge to improve instruction, programming, or the environment for students. This collective approach shifts the focus from the admiration of problems to solving them. His research found that PLCs could be cumbersome in a larger school community because of size as well as diversity in values and vision for the school.

Perceptions of collaboration. Understanding the perceptions of the stakeholders is an integral part of creating a positive climate within any organization. Collaboration only works if the stakeholders are positive, focused, and invested in their school. It is the responsibility of the school leader to “create a positive organizational climate through effective leadership” (Black, 2010, p. 437). Effective leaders recognize the perceptions of their stakeholders and then use those perceptions to create a collaborative environment focused on change.

Butler (2007) conducted research for his dissertation focusing on the perceptions of the employees associated with collaborative leadership in a higher education setting. Butler’s dissertation was to specifically review how employees perceive the interactions of a collaborative leadership style. He used a mixed method of qualitative through a survey and quantitative through interview questions research. He was able to work with 35 participants at various levels within the higher education institutions. First, he had to identify if the organizations were in fact collaborative in nature. Once he was able to identify an institution as a collaborative, he found that the major factor in a positive perception of collaboration was open communication. Lack of communication led to confusion and tension within the institution. On

the contrary, open communication that shared information both formally and informally was welcomed. Overall, this dissertation found that employees have a positive perception of effective collaborative leadership, with communication being the key factor to this perception.

In another related research study conducted in Ethiopia, the researcher Tesfaw (2014) surveyed educators in relation to transformational leadership. Through the twenty question study, using a five-point Likert-style survey, the researcher found that leadership could influence job satisfaction. There are other extraneous factors, such as salary, that can influence job satisfaction. However, the research did show that teachers responded to an environment where they felt valued. Tesfaw makes several recommendations based upon his study. The first recommendation was to create an environment developed around “efficient team work” (Tesfaw, 2014, p. 914). Although transformational leadership differs from collaborative leadership, this study does still highlight that teachers are positively responsive to a collaborative environment.

A collaborative leadership style allows for the administration to have a better relationship with their collective bargaining groups. Teachers feel that this democratic environment creates a more satisfying professional atmosphere (Padilla, 2009). Teachers have a voice in the decision-making process. The perceptions of collaborative leadership have been explored through research, but never correlated between this chosen leadership style and the school culture.

Impact of Collaborative Leadership within Schools

Teacher efficacy. Education has a high rate of professionals leaving their career choice after the first few years. In research conducted by Dauksas and White (2010), the researchers reported that on a daily basis nearly 1,000 teachers choose to leave their career of teaching. This has a staggering annual cost of about \$7 billion in professional development, hiring, replacement, and even recruitment costs. They focused their study on what factors would have influenced

teachers to stay. The top factor was collaboration. Teachers reported that lack of teamwork and opportunity to collaborate created an unsupportive environment. Another factor was the lack of input teachers had on student-learning outcomes. Teachers need to collaborate in the planning processes of student achievement. “When teachers realize their responsibility to ask questions and work as problem solvers, they gain confidence and extend their own learning” (p. 29).

In a similar study conducted by Johnson (2006), it showed that 75% of first-year teachers remain in the teaching profession, however much less in urban areas. Among many of the contributing factors, Johnson found that unsupportive working environments and the lack of collaboration were two main areas causing teachers to leave the profession. “There is some evidence that teachers today place more value on the opportunity to work together with their colleagues” (p. 7). Both of these research studies highlight that teachers are expressing the need for a supportive and collaborative working environment that values them as professionals. Creating an environment where schools can retain teachers at a higher rate will save in professional development and replacement costs. These two studies were further supported in the responses from a widespread survey interviewing over 8,500 participants (Sveiby & Simons 2002). The responses to the survey indicate that when looking for employment, collaborative environments are enticing for recruitment of employees in both the private and public industries.

Margolin (2012) conducted a four-year qualitative ethnographic study where she created a collaborative environment between four different subgroups: administrators, teachers, pre-service teachers, and college faculty in education. Margolin led this experimental program and then used the transcripts as her data point. This study found that when school administrators demonstrate a “respect for teachers, encouraging transparency, and trust in the team” (p. 82) Teachers then have a “sense of belonging and security, enabling them to take risks and fail” (p.

82). The outcome of this study highlights that a collaborative environment allows for faculty and administrators to learn from one another and grow professionally from these experiences.

Teachers who feel supported and effective are more likely to sustain a career in education. A collaborative environment creates a culture where teachers feel connected to one another and the leadership team. They do not feel isolated, but a part of the team. They have a team to help them solve problems and address student need. Collaboration fosters a positive culture within a school setting (Russell, 2008).

Allowing for faculty and staff to be an active part of the decision-making process supports an environment wherein they become leaders. As the stakeholders become leaders, they evolve into better problem solvers (Fullan, 2001). A collaborative leader embraces an environment that “encourages teamwork, joint problem solving and planning” (Russell, 2008, p. 79). Collaboration empowers those stakeholders to take ownership of issues and solve them. Teachers feel they are valued and respected. With this, they are willing to share new ideas and take risks in a supported and trusted environment (Ohlson, 2009).

Impact on stakeholder groups. In an article discussing distributed leadership (a synonym for collaborative leadership), Fusarelli, Kowalski and Petersen (2011) explore how schools are including this leadership practice. In distributed leadership, a leader creates an environment where all members of the organization are engaged in decision-making. This environment creates a “shared initiative and responsibility” (pg. 47). Distributive leadership takes the collaborative environment to a higher level. The participants are not only sharing their opinions and thoughts, they are the change agents as well. This creates an environment of ownership amongst the members of the organization. Schools have set policies that must be followed which do not lend themselves well to a distributive leadership environment. However,

there is evidence of school districts changing to a more distributive style. School districts can do so through committee work and allowing teachers to lead various initiatives. They can also create an environment where they have the community involved in their board committees so that all voices and perspectives are shared. Distributive leadership creates a culture where all feel ownership over the decisions and initiatives.

Leadership should be modeled from the top-down. If the goal is collaboration, the Superintendent of Schools should implement this model. Research reviewing three case studies demonstrates how three different superintendents utilized community collaboration within their school (Brazier, Rich, & Ross, 2010). The three had differing approaches to the use of collaboration. One superintendent chose to create a committee where he was more actively listening than engaging in the conversation. Another superintendent chose to create an environment where removed his authority and delegated the decision-making process to those within the committee. The third superintendent employed an environment was a bit more structured. He educated the committee on the topic at hand and then allowed for respectful debate amongst the committee. Researchers noted that in each case, the superintendent worked effectively at creating a collaborative environment focused on school improvement for the students. There was a mutual understanding for the “need to build a broad-based commitment” (p. 215) amongst the stakeholders within the community.

As highlighted in the previous study, collaboration should not just occur between those employed with school districts. Parents and community should be involved because they are directly impacted by the output of school systems. The University of Hartford, lead the Parent Information Action Research (PIAR) Project where ten parents from five surrounding communities went through a process of collaborating with those in their community (Bray,

Pedro, Kenney, & Gannotti, 2014). These parents, along with researchers from the university, held meetings within their community where they listened to the concerns and ideas from community members regarding early education of students. Following this, they reviewed the data they had collected to look for common patterns. This process allowed parents to become leaders within their community and for community members to share their perceptions and concerns. The surrounding schools were then able to make responsive choices to the patterns of concerns discovered through this research. The premise of this research was based on the “understanding that sustained change occurs from the individual and his / her interactions with the layers of community and institution” (p. 10). To extend this further, Med (2010) suggests that local universities should be involved in the collaborative process because they are training the future educators. The community at large should be involved in collaboration for the betterment of the school system. Once the community is involved in collaborative leadership, it is uncertain through existing research if there is a correlation between this leadership style and the school climate.

School improvement. There are many research studies surrounding the impact that collaboration can have on school achievement. Researchers worked with a school that transformed from low achieving to high achieving over the course of a six-year process. The administration of this school set out to create shared leadership (the same concept as collaborative leadership). The researchers tracked how they were able to do this and what effect it had on the school. Through their research, they found the shared leadership communicates a shared vision for student achievement. The administrators set clear expectations for the shared leadership roles within the school. Teachers embraced those roles and began working toward the shared vision. The outcome was the conversion of a poor

academic school to be a high performing school. Shared leadership was the vehicle in which change was able to occur (Hauge & Vedoy, 2014).

A different set of researchers conducted a four-year longitudinal study, using the reading achievement data of 192 elementary schools (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). These researchers focused on the impact that collaborative leadership has on short-term and long-term school improvement. Through their data, they were able to conclude that collaborative leadership can be “indirectly and significantly associated with initial student learning levels” (p. 667). They were able to correlate both direct and indirect impacts on long-term school improvement. According to this study, collaboration is an important aspect of improving student achievement.

In a more specific study, Abbott and McKnight (2010) conducted five-year longitudinal research of nine Title I elementary schools. Title I schools have at least 40% of the population as economically disadvantaged and receive federal funding to provide supplemental supports for students. These nine elementary schools were chosen because they have higher achievement rates than other Title I schools with similar demographics. Through this study, they found that collaborative leadership has two main positive impacts on school achievement. First, there is a higher degree of the identification of students in need of extra supports. Those supports are more targets because the faculty is discussing effective instructional strategies for particular students. Secondly, grade level teachers are having more dialogue. As students transition from one grade to the next, information is being freely shared. Overall, this study has one major theme: collaborative leadership improves instruction. Communication about students thus has a positive impact on students receiving the services or instruction that best meets their needs.

The need for a collaborative environment in a school setting was further supported in a

research study reviewing the two variables of collaboration and principal leadership (Duyer, Gumus, & Bellibas, 2012). Their findings discuss that the United States has implemented standards of teaching that incorporate collaboration because “teacher collaboration is viewed as a powerful strategy to create learning communities and improve schools” (p. 712).

A different take on the impact of collaboration was a research study focused on the culture of schools (Ohlson, 2009). This research reviewed a collaborative environment and its impact on out-of-school suspensions. When students are suspended from school, they are missing direct instruction which has a negative impact on their achievement. This research found that in a collaboration environment, the faculty and staff focused more on students because of increased communication. The faculty was more willing to intervene with student discipline before it rose to the level of an office referral.

Special education. Collaborative leadership lends itself naturally to special education. A student with a disability has an individualized education plan (IEP) that clearly states the goals and accommodations that the student needs to access the curriculum in the most effective manner. The process of writing and devising the IEP, which is reviewed at a minimum of once a year, should be collaborative in nature. The entire team of educators, parents, student, paraprofessionals, and administrator should be working together to ensure that the IEP meets the student’s needs and appropriately addresses all concerns. In a qualitative research study by DeMatthews (2015), he explores how one school clearly set a goal to be more collaborative in the leadership of students with disabilities. This school wanted a more inclusive environment where students with disabilities were included with their non-disabled peers as often as possible. The leader in the building worked to create a collaborative leadership environment for inclusion. In fostering this collaboration for inclusion, the school had high-achieving

students. In neighboring schools, there was an achievement gap between regular education and special education students of about 12%. In this collaborative elementary school, only a three percent gap exists (DeMatthews, 2015). Collaborative leadership fosters a supportive culture of learning for all stakeholders, specifically students, “collaboration and leadership of teachers have become indispensable educational links for creating effective learning environments for students” (Foster, 2006, p. 75).

Summary

Collaborative leadership is one leadership style that can have a strong impact on a school setting. As indicated by Hallinger (2011), who reviewed over forty years worth of empirical research on educational leadership, the sharing of leadership is a “powerful tool for expanding the school’s capacity to achieve its vision” (p. 13). Effective school leadership is an essential component to student achievement. In recent years, collaborative leadership has become a popular trend either for a stand-alone leadership style or embedded into other leadership theories. Collaborative leadership has gained traction because it allows all stakeholders to communicate openly while being active participants in the decision-making process in a democratic environment. Collaborative leaders rely on “the intelligent and resourcefulness of their staff” (Goman, 2014, p. 35). There are various levels of implementation that school leaders currently employ. Through Professional Learning Communities, there is a set structure the collaborative setting, allowing all to stakeholders to share their expertise and knowledge.

With the heightened expectations of educators in the ever-changing 21st Century world, school leaders must incorporate the most effective leadership practices. Through the literature discussed, school achievement and climate can be positively impacted through the implementations of an effective collaborative leadership model. As the Center for Educational

Policy Analysis (2004) expands, developing a collaborative process is one of the four manners in which a school can be more effective (Leithwood, 2003, p. 5). Shared goals and open communication foster strong public school environments for students, faculty, and administration.

The research supports that collaborative leadership can be an effective leadership style to create change in various organizations. However, there is a gap in the research that does not specifically identify the practical application of collaborative leadership in a school setting. To further that gap, there is no research to show any correlation between school climate and collaborative leadership. This research study investigated both of those areas to fulfill those gaps within the collaborative leadership research.

Chapter 3

Introduction

As discussed in previous chapters, collaborative leadership is one process of leadership that allows for stakeholders to be an active part in the decision-making process. This phenomenological research examined the perceptions that both principal and teachers hold about how social interactions relate to collaboration. Theorists suggest that collaboration is an effective leadership tool (Maddock, 2011, Padilla, 2009, Tesfaw, 2014), as outlined in Chapter Two. This research looked further into the phenomenon of collaboration and the perceptions of relationship building in two elementary schools located in one district in Northeastern Pennsylvania. The following questions guided the research:

1. **Central Question:** How does the principal establish relationships with the teachers to foster a collaborative environment within an elementary school setting in a school district located in Northeastern Pennsylvania?
 - a. *Sub-question 1:* What characteristics of social interactions do principals feel are important for an effective collaborative environment?
 - b. *Sub-question 2:* What characteristics of social interactions do teachers feel are important for an effective collaborative environment?

Research Design and Rationale

Introduction to the Design

The researcher employed two sets of qualitative data collection with one-on-one interviews and focus-group interviews. The phenomenological qualitative study allowed the researcher to use the words of participants to understand different perspectives as well as gain insights into the application of collaborative leadership (Creswell, 2015). Using two elementary

schools located in one district within Northeastern Pennsylvania, the researcher conducted a total of six interview sessions. Two of the interview sessions were one-on-one interview with each building principal. Following the two interviews with the principal at each school location, the researcher conducted the next four interview sessions, using focus-group interviews. For each of the two schools, there were two separate focus-group interviews with the teachers of the respective schools.

With the belief of social constructivism, the researcher gained insight into the relationships within the organization and understanding the “process of interaction among individuals” (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). The qualitative design allowed the researcher to understand the principals’ and teachers’ perceptions of the social interactions in relation to collaboration using their own words and thoughts (Creswell, 2013). Maxwell (2013) discusses that interviews “provide additional information that was missed in observation” (p. 103). The researcher utilized the constructivist phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013) to focus on the themes and trends that develop through the process of the one-on-one interviews and the focus-group interviews. The themes were determined through the responses given (Maxwell, 2013).

Rationale

This above-described research design was chosen to best address the research questions. The design investigated the phenomenon of collaboration and the key social interactions that must be in place for effective collaboration. The design also allowed the researcher to evaluate the perspectives of the principals and teachers within an elementary education setting. This phenomenological research allowed the research to minimize individual experiences in an attempt to understand the universal essence of the social context of collaboration (Creswell, 2013). This research allowed for a pragmatic exploration of collaborative leadership that does

not rely on one philosophy but the actual reality and application of this leadership process (Creswell, 2003).

Site and Population

Population Description

The targeted population for this study included the two building principals and the 12 teachers of two elementary schools located within the same district located in Northeastern Pennsylvania. The researcher contacted the gatekeeper of this research study. The role of gatekeeper, “an individual who provides entrance to the site” (Creswell, 2014, p. 210), will be to serve as a representative in each school from their main office. In each of the elementary schools, the gatekeeper was the building principal.

The teachers within both schools received an e-mail explaining the research study, the purpose, and then inviting them to two different focus-group interview sessions with a minimum of three participants per focus-group interview, but no more than ten. Having three participants per study at a minimum allowed 12 differing perspectives to be shared and then later analyzed. There was a maximum of ten per focus-group interview session set because of logistics of the interview process, but that was not a concern. For each school, two focus-group interview sessions were held at times convenient for the faculty members. Although the district and elementary schools were chosen, the teacher participants will be a random sampling based on availability and interest. They will not be delineated by gender, race, age, or other types of demographic characteristics. Personal information such as name was not requested for the research study. Each participant was assigned a number by school for analysis of the coding process. This number system protected the participants’ identity and allowed for the researcher to track individual comments through the coding process.

Site Description

Two elementary schools located within a district in Northeastern Pennsylvania are selected. These schools were chosen for several reasons. The principals within these schools have each been leading each respective school for at least three years. They have had the opportunity to put in place their chosen leadership style. The schools have not experienced leadership transition. Both schools have different leadership styles to allow for teachers and principals to share their perspective from different experiences and vantage points.

The two elementary schools are located in Northeastern Pennsylvania in a suburban neighborhood. Both schools are Title I Schools, which means that at least 40% of their student population receives free or reduced lunch. The names of the schools have been changed to protect with anonymity. Mountain School has approximately 500 students with a faculty of about 50, including all specialty area and support teachers. Lake School has approximately 350 students with a faculty of about 35, including all specialty area and support teachers.

Site Access

Most school districts will allow the researcher access to their principals and teachers. The researcher made contact first with the Superintendent of the school district, which will be named Academia School District from this point forward. The Superintendent of Academia then contacted the School Board to gain their approval. Once receiving the approval from the Superintendent, the researcher wrote a brief synopsis of the research to send to two of the elementary principals. Both principals agreed for their school involvement in this study. The two chosen will be referred to as Mountain Elementary and Lake Elementary for purposes of keeping the identities of those involved confidential.

Prior to conducting the survey, the researcher issued Certificate of Confidentiality to the participants and received a signed Informed Consent of each participant. Participants were informed of purpose of the interview and any possible risks. All participants also received a guarantee that their personal information will not be shared. The researcher only reviewed and shared the results of the responses given, not their personal information. As noted above, both the district name and elementary school names were changed to protect confidentiality.

Research Methods

The research method will be two sets of qualitative interviews, with a total of six interview sessions. First, the building principals were interviewed separately to understand their perspectives of collaboration. These one-on-one interviews allowed the principals to speak freely about the teachers in a confidential setting (Creswell, 2015). Following these one-on-one interviews, two focus-group teacher interviews were conducted within each school. The teachers included in focus-group interviews had the opportunity to interact with one another (Creswell, 2015). The principals were not present for the focus-group interview to protect confidentiality and allowed the teachers to feel comfortable that their comments will not be shared with their leader. The sample size for teachers was 12.

Qualitative Data Collection

The researcher collected the qualitative data through two one-on-one interviews with each respective building principal. Then, the second data set was collected through focus-group interviews with teachers from each of the two schools. The open-ended interviews focused on what social interactions are necessary for effective collaboration. These open-ended questions looked to gain an insight on how relationships are built for collaboration. The principals and

teachers shared what they felt are the integral characteristics of social interactions that foster a collaborative environment.

Two instruments were devised for this research study. The first tool was used for the one-on-one interviews with each of the building principals. This instrument tool was comprised of a set of open-ended questions (See Appendix B). The second tool was utilized for the focus-group interviews with faculty (See Appendix C). This tool includes a set of open-ended, prescribed questions. Based on participant answers, some follow up questions were generated in order to delve deeper into the participant's experience and knowledge. The interview process is "emergent and flexible" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 18) in adding follow up questions to ensure that the participants are fully understood and that all relevant information is shared as thoughts surface. After reviewing the feedback and themes in this research, the researcher did reach out to the principals for clarification in one area that will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Qualitative Data Analysis Procedures

The qualitative data received was the responses to one-on-one interviews and focus-group interviews. Each of the responses was correlated to the perceived characteristics of social interactions necessary for collaboration. Using this coding system, the researcher was able to decipher which components receive more focus within the collaborative leadership style. The researcher investigates if the principals and teachers have similar or differing themes of characteristics. Using the phenomenological data analysis (Creswell, 2013), of identifying categories and trends within the data collected (Charmaz, 2010); the researcher created Nvivo codes to highlight themes throughout the interviews (Creswell, 2015). The process began with open coding of the responses and then at the next stage moved to axial coding to identify the themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Based on this axial coding, "clusters of meaning" (Creswell,

2013, p. 82) were identified to receive a structural description of the social contexts of collaboration.

Stages of Data Collection

Approval

Prior to beginning this research, the research received approval from Drexel University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB reviewed the research under the three prongs outlined in the Belmont Report (1979): (a) respect for all persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice. Once the researcher received approval, each participant was notified. The research explicitly explained the research process and use of the collected data.

First stage. The first stage of this data collection process was to contact the Superintendent to gain approval to work with the two elementary schools in the Academia School District. Once the Superintendent gains approval from the board, the researcher was able to reach out to two various elementary principals within the district. Two elementary school principals volunteered. They were the two that were intended originally by the researcher.

Second stage. In November and December of 2016, the researcher conducted the two one-on-one interviews with each principal. Then, also in November, the researcher sent an e-mail to the faculty of both schools explaining the research purpose and goal. The e-mail outlined the research process and invited them to the focus-group interview. Volunteers were selected on a first come, first served basis. In November and December of 2016, the researcher conducted the four focus-group teacher interviews, two at each school.

Third stage. This then led to the third stage in the data collection procedure in December of 2016. The researcher began the transcription and coding process of the responses.

This process took approximately a month of time to ensure that the interviews are successfully transcribed and the comments were effectively coded with themes reviewed and analyzed.

Timeline of Research Process			
Month	Preparation	Participants	Purpose
October 2016	Approval of Research from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Committee IRB 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher Committee IRB 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gain approval of the research study from Drexel's Dissertation Committee and also the IRB.
October 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contacted each Principal to establish an interview time in late October or early November. E-mailed the teachers of both schools to explain the research and establish two focus-group interview sessions in November for each school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal Researcher Teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure communication with Principals. Establish and confirm timeframe. Seek volunteer participants for focus-group interviews.
November 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducted both interviews with the building principal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal Researcher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect data to answer the research questions.
November/December 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducted four interviews with teachers (two per building). Transcribing the interviews conducted with the Principals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher Teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect data to answer the research questions. Transcribe the interview to begin the axial coding process.
December 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mailed handwritten thank you notes to all participants. Completed transcription of one-on-one interviews and focus-group interviews. Coding Process Qualitative Data Analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher Dr. Mawritz 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transcribe all of the interviews to properly code the comments. Axial coding process to look for common or disparate themes between teacher – teacher comparison and teacher – principal comparison.
January 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Chapter 4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher Dr. Mawritz 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalize analysis of data into the findings, results, and interpretation of the data collected.
January – February 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revisions of Chapter 4 Complete Chapter 5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher Dr. Mawritz 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Made necessary revisions based on feedback from Dr. Mawritz Finalized the draft of conclusions and recommendations of this research study.
March 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete all revisions to Chapter 4 and 5 Defend the dissertation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher Drexel Dissertation Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalized Chapters 4 and 5 to ensure accuracy and clarity. Defend the research conducted and conclusions made.

Figure 3.1: Timeline of Research

Ethical Considerations

The Belmont Report (1979) was issued by the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, now known as the US Department of Health and Human Services. This report outlines the ethical principles that need to be addressed when conducting research. It set forth federal regulations to protect and safeguard all participants in research. There are three main focus areas: (a) respect for all persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice.

The first principle of respect for all persons ensures that each participant, especially those with a disability, is treated as an autonomous individual. The participant had the right to make an informed decision prior to partaking in any research. The second principle, beneficence, sets forth two guidelines: (a) do not harm and (b) the possible benefits must outweigh the potential harm). The third principle of justice is a bit more complicated. It focuses on participants being treated equally, based upon need, effort, societal contribution, and merit. Those with equal backgrounds and experience should be treated in an equal manner (Galvez, Rose, Hagemann, & Aburto, 2006). Marrying these three principles together sets the framework for the creation of ethical research.

The researcher had the responsibility to ensure that the rights of the participants were protected, as well as their privacy. In the initial e-mail requesting participation, each participant received a Certificate of Confidentiality (Hicks, 2004a). There may be some stakeholders concerned with answering questions regarding their current leader. During the qualitative focus-group interviews, they were made to feel secure that the researcher respected and ensured their confidentiality. The participants each received Informed Consent (Hicks, 2004b). This outlined why the research was being conducted and how their responses will be used as data points. Participants had a full understanding of what they were engaging in prior to research being

conducted. Data was only collected from those volunteered participants that signed the receipt and confirmation of these two documents.

The participant names are held confidential. Only the teacher participants involved in each individual focus group knew the other participants. Confidentiality was expressed and outlined prior to the interview. Prior to the participants agreeing to the focus group, it was clearly explained that their comments included in the study will be shared, but not their names or school affiliation. Their names are withheld, but their comments were analyzed and included in the study. The district and individual school names have been changed to protect their identity and allow for confidentiality. The focus groups will not be able to be purely confidential since there will be multiple members within each group.

There is one ethical consideration within this research study. The stakeholders had the choice not to participate because of a concern that their building principal could link their answers with their identities. The researcher took every step necessary to ensure confidentiality within the survey participants. During the focus groups, the researcher requested for the principal to sign a waiver expressing that comments discussed during focus group sessions will be confidential and would not be permitted to be used for evaluative reasons.

As discussed earlier, the IRB process was successful completed. Drexel University's IRB approved this research study in October 2016. The researcher submitted the study, along with all documentation that will be distributed to the participants. The research included a detailed description of all procedures to provide full disclosure to the IRB (Creswell, 2014). The researcher outlined how confidentiality and privacy were to be protected. This included the e-mails sent to participants, interview questions, Certificate of Confidentiality, and Informed Consent (Savini, Matuk, Handler, & Rosenfeld, 2011). The IRB reviewed all materials to ensure

that the researcher had completed all of the necessary steps and upheld the rights and confidentiality of those participating. Once the researcher gained approval in October 2016 , the study will began.

Summary

This research included two different data collection steps to allow for an in-depth analysis in the perceptions principals and teachers hold about the social interaction characteristics necessary for collaboration. Using the phenomenological research approach, the researcher was able to understand the social context of collaboration based upon the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). Through the experiences of the principals and teachers, they have developed their own perspectives of how a collaborative environment must be structured to be effective. This research now provides a deeper understanding of what relationship characteristics principals and teachers feel are crucial for effective collaboration. Their perceptions were individually analyzed and then compared to one another, looking for possible themes and trends or possibly disparities in perceptual beliefs.

Chapter 4

Introduction

During the months of November and December in 2016, the researcher conducted six interviews for this phenomenological qualitative research study. The researcher conducted all six of these interviews within one school district, Academia, located in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Two of these interviews were one-on-one interview sessions with the respective principal of Lake and Mountain Schools using the Principal Interview Protocol (Appendix B). The other four of these interviews were focus-group interviews, two at both Lake and Mountain Schools using the Teacher Focus-Group Interview Protocol (Appendix C).

The purpose of these interviews was to gain insight into the social context necessary for an effective collaborative leadership environment. Using the phenomenological research approach, the teacher and principal participants shared their perspectives about the relationship characteristics necessary for collaborative leadership. Using the interview protocols, the participants shared their “reflective analysis of descriptions of lived experience” (Finlay, 2013, p. 175). Both of the principals report that they have created a collaborative leadership environment. The intention of these interviews was to answer the following research questions:

1. Central Question: How does the principal establish relationships with the teachers to foster a collaborative environment within an elementary school setting in a school district located in Northeastern Pennsylvania?

- a. *Sub-question 1:* What characteristics of social interactions do principals feel are important for an effective collaborative environment?
- b. *Sub-question 2:* What characteristics of social interactions do teachers feel are important for an effective collaborative environment?

The feedback from these interview sessions was extremely informative in better understanding the social context of a collaborative environment. The teachers and the principals offered their personal perspectives of what social context they feel is necessary for effective collaboration. From these interviews, the researcher transcribed the discussions and conducted the coding process to find themes and trends within the participant responses. Thus, the participant feedback is presented in the findings section. In the results and interpretations sections, the feedback collected through these interview sessions will be analyzed and then synthesized with the previous research on collaborative leadership. A discussion will follow on options for redressing the problem. The chapter will end with a summary reflection.

Findings

Principal One-on-One Interviews

The researcher conducted two separate one-on-one interview sessions with principals at two different elementary schools. Each principal interview occurred within the principal's office during a school day, lasting for approximately one hour. For the purpose of this research study, the researcher has changed the names to protect their identity and allow for confidentiality.

The researcher asked each principal the same set of 16 questions from the Principal Interview Protocol (Appendix B). The focus-group interview questions were broken into four main categories (Figure 4.1). The first three questions were to acquire background information on the principals' basic philosophy of leadership. The next set of four questions pertained to the establishment of collaborative leadership. The third section provided four questions to connect collaborative leadership with the specific relationship characteristics. The last set of questions dealt with actual experiences in collaborative leadership and the response they have received from their faculty dealing with this level of collaboration. Combined, these 16 questions allowed

the researcher to focus on the social context of collaboration in a practical elementary school environment.

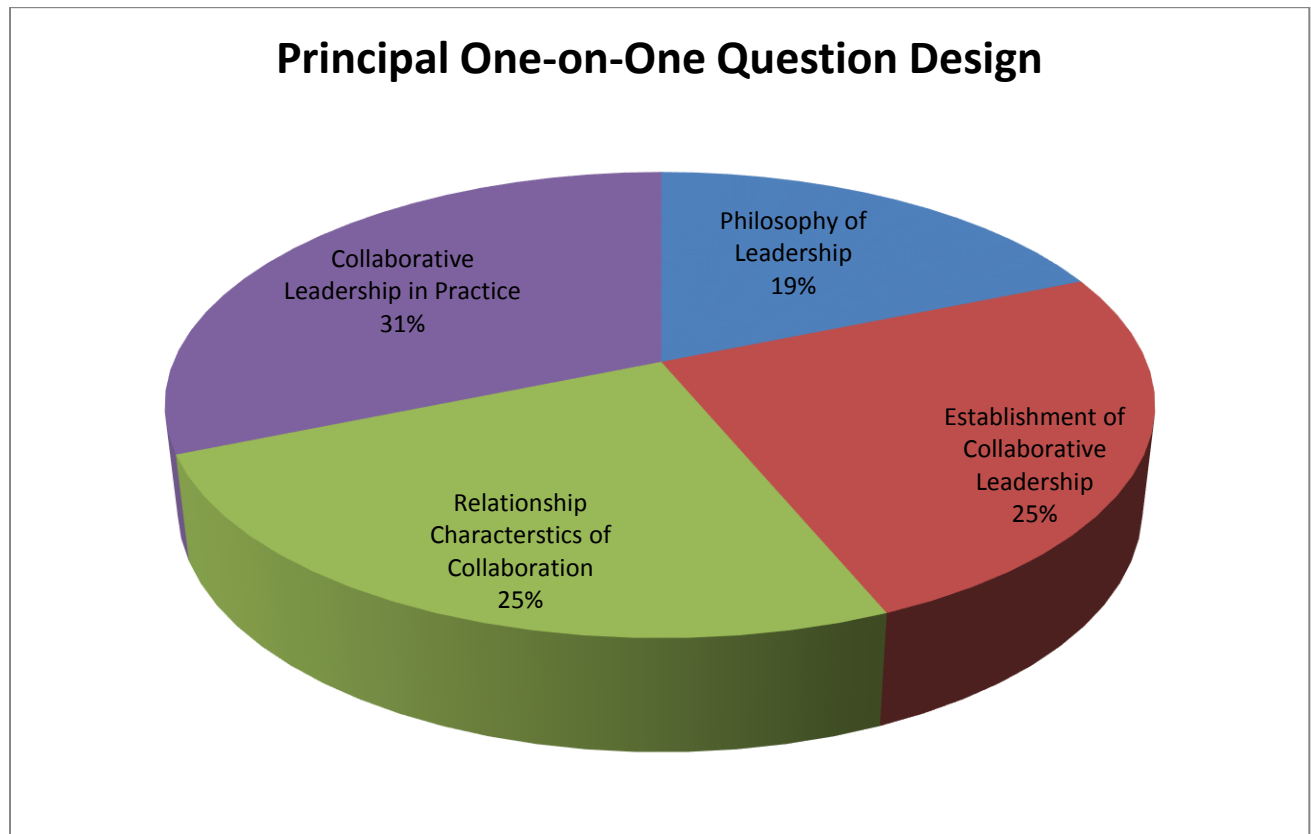


Figure 4.1: Principal One-on-One Question Design

The central research question in this study was to explore how does the principal establish relationships with the teachers to foster a collaborative environment within an elementary school setting in a school district located in Northeastern Pennsylvania? To further understand this concept, there was one specific sub-question concerning principals specifically what characteristics of social interactions do principals feel are important for an effective collaborative environment? Both principals were able to share with the researcher how collaboration was evident within their respective elementary school.

Lake School. Mr. White, the principal of Lake School has been in this position for over three years. Prior to that, he began his profession in education as a teacher for five years and

then became the principal of another school for five years. Mr. White feels he has effectively created a collaborative environment for his faculty and staff.

Philosophy of leadership. Mr. White spoke much about his role of empowerment within the Lake School. He feels that his style is “to find ways to empower the staff to creatively teach our children what we think they should learn.” Mr. White further explained that he feels his philosophy of leadership is “well, it is very collaborative. I look to build capacity within and I trust them. I empower them. I try to provide them with the responsibility and sense of worth.”

Establishment of collaborative leadership. Mr. White explained that he did not feel that he intentionally created a collaborative leadership environment but that it was inherent in his personality. He explained through his dialogue that through his personal experience and personality characteristics, he is naturally a collaborative person. This natural characteristic trait then bleeds into his leadership style. He did not feel that he directly set a plan to be collaborative, but that collaboration has always been a part of whom he is. Mr. White discussed that this is an authentic belief of collaboration:

I think that if you have to purposely focus on that (collaboration), then maybe you need to check yourself. It should come a little more easily than that. It should be natural. And (*sic*) if it's not natural, then people will go with it up until a point. They will go with it ok and they will play along until a point. But, after a while, then they will probably stop. So, it's a natural thing.

It was not an intentional thought process of reading about a collaborative leadership style and then deciding to implement that style.

Mr. White explained that in order to establish collaborative leadership, “the leader needs to take the position of not knowing all. And (*sic*) seeks input and advice to come to maybe a different conclusion possibly or maybe the initial conclusions.”

Relationship characteristics of collaboration. Mr. White expressed that the first relationship characteristic needed is, “well, you have to have trust.” He then further explained that the leader must build relationships. He elaborated by saying, “That’s person by person. It’s through modeling.” He discussed that he feels it is imperative to create relationships built on trust throughout the school. According to Mr. White, in order to build trust, a leader needs to model:

You can’t have a top-down authoritative position, in my opinion, and still expect collaboration. I like that people think that I am working right alongside of them. In fact, I like them to think that I am working harder than they are. And (*sic*) will do that for them. And I do what’s needed to show that. So, I do that by example.

Mr. White outlined a longer list of important relationship characteristics:

Relationship characteristics. Again, we go back to some of those earlier ones. Trust, the ability to make mistakes and not be chastised for them. Open door policy, I mean a real open door policy. People have to be able to tell. I have people telling me about their personal lives. Things like that so they have to have a high level of trust.

Mr. White emphasized the importance of creating a trusting environment and working alongside his teaching staff for the common goal of student growth.

Collaborative leadership in practice. Mr. White discussed a specific scenario to highlight effective collaborative leadership within Lake School. Mr. White explained that on a professional development day in the Fall:

I was not in the building. So, I had to collaborate with my staff. Can you guys, create from within, can we (*sic*)? Here are some ideas that I can do. Can you do this training? Can you be the people to do it? And (*sic*) we did.

Mr. White further elaborated about how successful the day was. The teachers took on the leadership roles as trainers within the Lake School. He expressed that the teacher trainers were happy to do their trainings and the teacher participants were receptive to learning from their colleagues.

When asked how an outsider would recognize that Lake School is a collaborative environment, Mr. White spoke more about the feelings an outside would recognize. He said the following:

Hopefully, if you met me, I could provide you with that feeling, that sense of sincerity, of caring. You would hopefully see people that are happy. See people who are doing maybe some different things in their classrooms. People who are obviously not afraid of the principal walking in (*sic*). They are not staging something, but they are relaxed at what they do.

Mr. White further explained about parents, “If you ran into parents, you might see people that are really generally happy to have their children here, excited and proud.”

Mountain School. Mr. Brown, principal of Mountain School has been in this position for over 10 years. Before his experience as principal of Mountain School, Mr. Brown was an assistant principal for four years. Just as Mr. White expressed, Mr. Brown feels he has created an effective collaborative environment throughout his school.

Philosophy of leadership. Mr. Brown feels that his current role is more a manager of the school:

Well, in this situation here, I’m more of a building manager. I make sure things take place more so than an educational leader, which would be more of the intended role. But, the way that we (principals) were brought into this was as a manager.

He went on to explain that within the district, there are many expectations for building principals that take away the time of being a true instructional leader and just being a manager. He did explore that this makes collaborative leadership ideal because he is able to put teachers in those leadership roles. He believes that his style of leadership is, “more of a hands-off approach and allowing staff to find their own way for things.”

Establishment of collaborative leadership. Mr. Brown expressed that he never specifically stated that he was a collaborative leader, but that collaboration allows for all people

to come together to solve problems. He expressed that during meetings, they “come up with group decisions to issues throughout the school.” He has worked to ensure that “a variety of people are working together. Teachers, specialists, Reading, RtII, they are all working together with the principal to improve the educational process and then the programs.” He feels that it is important for everyone to “get their ideas out there and talk to see what’s working for people.”

Relationship characteristics of collaboration. Mr. Brown clearly emphasized the importance of creating comfort within the collaborative environment. He explained that he was “letting them know that they’re pretty much in a risk-free environment to express their opinions as we go along.” He has worked to create an environment where staff has “a lot of freedom for the staff if they have ideas and they bring them to me and they sound good, well, go for it (*sic*).” He explained that collaboration can only exist through trust where the teachers know “you are all working on the same team.”

Mr. Brown discussed that collaboration occurs best if teachers within the school are open minded:

I think you need people with open minds. People confident in their abilities. That (*sic*) would be willing to express their opinions and ideas. You need people with an attitude that they’re going to go out and change things. That they’re willing to take risks and get out there and work together to express their ideas and use their creativity.

He worried that it would not work with “people that are a little to set in their ways.” He explained that the collaboration works well with a specific grouping of teachers:

I think sometimes collaboration works with more of the middle range of teachers in their career than it does with early or veteran. You know, veteran teachers are pretty much set. The middle teachers are more willing to experiment. The younger teachers don’t have that voice yet. You know, to say, I think that this is a good way to do it. The middle group is pretty much where we go.

He then further explained that teachers need to feel supported in order to effectively collaborate, “they know that I have their backs, which is important.” He further explained that with new initiatives coming from the district-level, it can sometimes be difficult for teachers:

They know they can take a risk. They can try other things. It’s difficult at times with new programs that come out. You know, too much of a canned sort of curriculum coming out. Here’s what you do and this page here has these things. We realize that some of the creativity is lost there. But they know that I am always willing to let them try something and do more if it’s something as simple as a video to watch or give the students rewards for whatever. It’s for the kids. They know that I am there for them.

Collaborative leadership in practice. Mr. Brown discussed how special education at Mountain School creates a collaborative environment. All of the teachers are working to ensure that students’ needs are met. Mr. Brown explained more about collaboration at Mountain School:

Well there’s a lot of collaboration in working with our special education students. We have to find the appropriate placement, strategies for the different scenarios that come up. . . . We are busy here coming up with strategies and people sharing ideas. It works out pretty well.

When the researcher asked Mr. Brown how an outsider would recognize collaborative leadership within Mountain School, he explained what he feels that person would see in his school:

Well, you would see the principal out and about. Talking with teachers. Teachers willing to try new ideas. You would see teachers meeting. Talking as they’re supposed to be doing like today during their grade level meeting. You would see the principal attending meetings, as many as possible. You would see that working together. You would see school-wide positive behavior support type of things.

Teacher Focus-Group Interviews

There were 12 total participants in the focus-group interviews. There were three teacher participants per interview session, with four total sessions. Two of the interview sessions were held at each respective school. In both schools, one session was held prior to the school day and one was held following the school day. They occurred within a volunteering teacher’s

classroom, lasting about an hour. Although it was not intentionally planned to have an even number of participants since it was a volunteer sampling basis, it did happen that there were six teacher participants from both Lake and Mountain School. To protect the identities of the teachers, the researcher assigned each participant a number. These participants will be identified as Participants One through Six in both respective schools.

The researcher posed similar questions to the teachers during their interview sessions as were posed to the principals. There were 13 questions used in the Teacher Focus-Group Interview Protocol (Appendix C). The teacher interview questions followed the same scaffolding approach (Figure 4.2). First, the researcher asked two questions about what the teachers feel is their current principal's leadership style. Then, there was a set of four questions regarding how collaborative leadership was established. The next set of four questions dealt with the relationship characteristics that teachers feel are necessary for effective collaboration. The final set of questions was based around the current practical application of collaborative leadership. Combined, these 13 questions allowed the researcher to focus on the social context of collaboration in a practical elementary school environment.

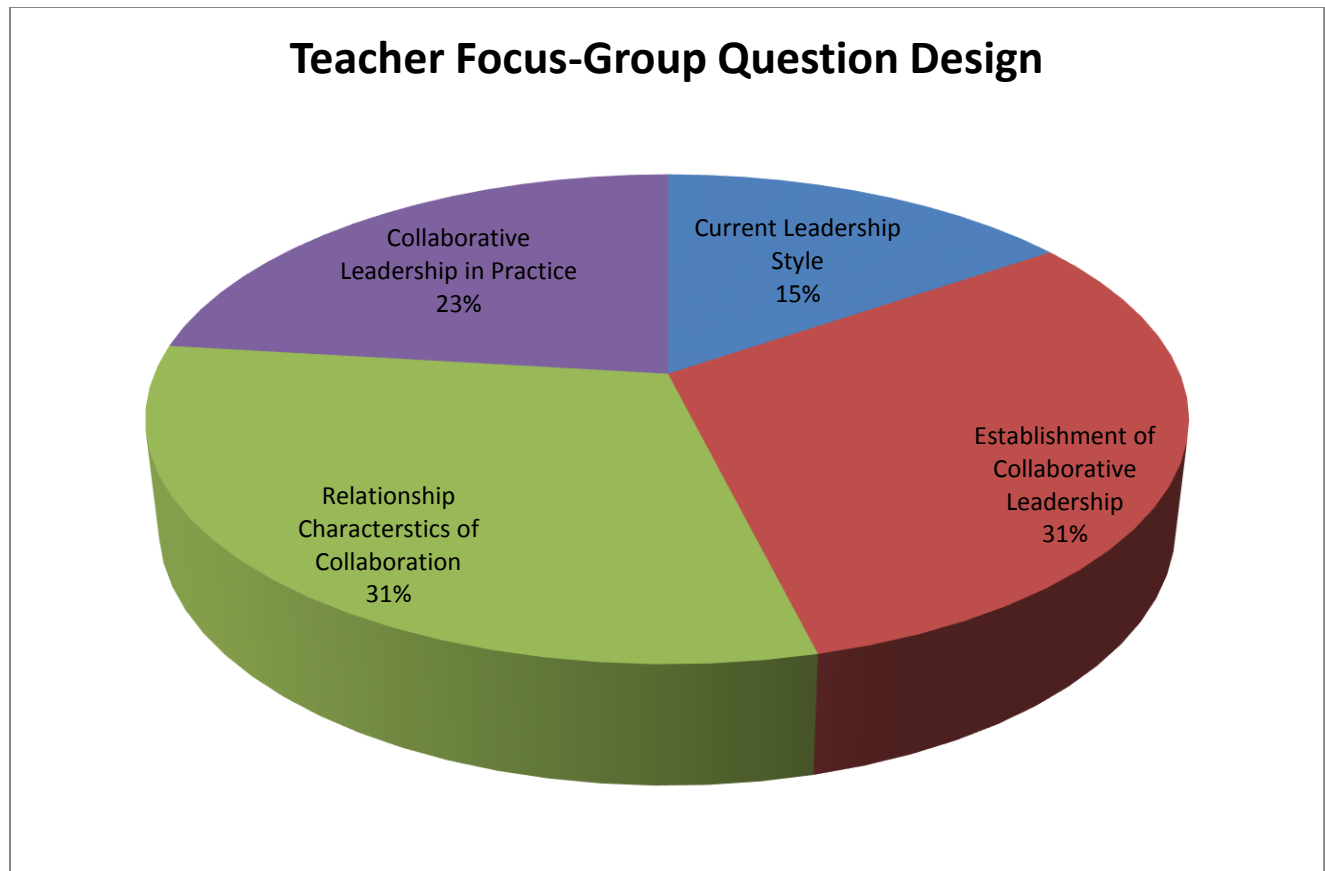


Figure 4.2: Teacher Focus-Group Question Design

As explained previously, the central research question in this study was how does the principal establish relationships with the teachers to foster a collaborative environment within an elementary school setting in a school district located in Northeastern Pennsylvania? To further explore that concept, there was one specific sub-question concerning teachers specifically what characteristics of social interactions do teachers feel are important for an effective collaborative environment?

Lake School. The researcher conducted two interview sessions at the Lake School with three teacher participants in each session. To protect their identity and allow for confidentiality, the researcher has assigned these participants numbers to replace their names. These participants will be referred to as Participants One through Six. Each of these participants has been a teacher

within this school for over five years, with careers in the district spanning a minimum of 10 years.

Current leadership style. During the first interview session, all three participants used the term supportive to describe the current leadership style at Lake School. Participant Three explained, “Support with parent involvement. When you have parents that have an issue with something you are doing. You know he’s there to listen to both sides but also to make sure that he is behind his teachers and supporting them.” Continuing with the conversation about parent complaints, Participant One highlighted that the current principal also supports open communication. She said the being open is important:

And (*sic*) at the same time, I think that the staff has to feel comfortable to share with the principal when there is a parent issue because you have a lot of parents that come back at principals and they get caught off guard. And (*sic*) then I think that causes friction. So, I think if you’re comfortable with your principal, he can feel, then it’s an open kind of conversation when you have kids issues or parent issues.

Participant One explained that she feels the current leadership style is one of professionalism:

Well, if they believe that you are truly a professional, they treat you that way. I think that sort of comes naturally. They kind of think that if you don’t have the ability, they then tend to micromanage and then they tell you everything. I think that you sort of lose leverage. That is not the case in this school.

Participant Three echoed this sentiment by explaining what she feels are the positive attributes of Mr. White’s current leadership style:

I think that he does all of those things that we talked about. Giving the positive feedback. Positives, he comes into the classroom. He knows what’s going on in his building. You know, he takes care of what needs to be taken care of and he doesn’t when he doesn’t. He doesn’t see the need to micromanage. He doesn’t. And (*sic*) he respects us as professionals.

Participant Five further supported this by explaining she feels Mr. White’s leadership style is as in the following:

I think that the current leadership style in our building is all of what we talked about. I feel that he's very involved and that he listens. And (*sic*) he allows others to take on that leadership role. He wants you to take that leadership role. And (*sic*) empowers you to do so. I feel that he will set the guidelines and then he feeds it out to the staff to step up and help to do all of those things.

Participant Six summed up what all of the participants were explaining by saying, "In my conversations with him, it's always, if it's in the best interest of the students, do it."

Establishment of collaborative leadership. During the first teacher focus-group interview session, Participants One, Two, and Three spoke about how collaboration is not necessarily sitting down with your colleagues to plan specific lessons. Participant One shared, "We share a lot but as far as actual you sitting down and planning a long list of things, sometimes that's more difficult." They discussed that collaboration amongst their colleagues is not always formal, but free flowing as they go through their day. They share resources and materials depending on activities.

All six of the participants explained that collaboration happens during their contractual meeting time monthly. However, they further explained other areas where collaboration is evidenced. Participant Five confirmed the following:

I think it (collaboration) is kind of like what we have going on in our building now. And I think it's growing. Like even with the past professional development day, everybody took that leadership role and did different sessions. We worked together and then we all collaborated together in the end.

Participant Six discussed how during meetings, there is more inclusion of all teachers in specific discussions. He was referencing the analysis of the results to the Pennsylvania State Standardized Assessment (PSSA's):

And (*sic*) this idea as well, like he had of this of vertical kind of discussions. I haven't really seen that before. This idea that 5th grade is struggling with PSSA Math. So, you know we need to figure out why and instead of always talking to 5th grade, why don't we get even Kindergarten in the same room. And (*sic*) let's all sit down and talk together about what is each grade level seeing as the major issues going down the line. Then

working back up the line to see, well, ok, what can we do to help (*sic*). Because whether you're a PSSA assessed grade or not, we're all in the same boat.

Participant Six continued by explaining collaboration between teachers:

Cross-grade collaboration. And (*sic*) then having that say, ok, yes, we can understanding this here. Now, how are we going to work on this problem? What are we going to do to solve it to go even further. Then we go into planning of events. Let's do an instructional night for parents. This kind of thing. So it's not just here's a problem, it's the team of teachers working together to take it step further to solve it.

Each of the six participants at Lake School contributed that they feel there is a strong collaborative environment amongst their peers and their principal.

Participant Five further expanded explaining that Mr. White does not solely want collaboration internally, but with parents and the community as well:

And (*sic*) it's not even just during the school day. He wants us to reach out to the parents. Having parent nights and addressing concerns. If they are not understanding the math, who wants to step up and teacher the parents about the math? And (*sic*) where they can find resources to help them.

Participant Four echoed that comment by saying, "Attending PTO meetings, hearing the concerns of the parents and then taking it back to the faculty." Participant Five agreed with these comments by explaining that "it's very much a problem-solving kind of thing. And one of the things that I like about him (*Mr. White*) is that we're a team."

Four out of the six Lake School participants discussed that common planning times amongst their peers assists them with creating a collegial collaborative environment.

Participants One, Two, and Three entered into a discussion that they believe the schedule created by Mr. White fosters collaboration. As Participant Two shared the following:

That's actually a really good point. One of the things that he did was he overlaps lunches by 15 minutes so Kindergarten and First Grade share lunch for 15 minutes. Kindergarten leaves and Second Grade comes in. So now, we overlap lunch for 15 minutes. And (*sic*) we have the opportunity to say, 'do you even teach nouns because the kids have no idea.' And (*sic*) then when the First Grade teachers leave, Third Grade comes in.

This intentional scheduling allows teachers to have 15 minutes with the grade level below and then above them. The teachers at Lake School report they are using this overlapping time as collaboration about content and student updates. Participant Three explained the outcome of this overlapping lunch period:

And (*sic*) I give you guys updates. I'm like, 'oh my gosh, your kids are doing so great this year.' I don't know what you were doing this year, but they know all about this and that. So, we're just letting them know that it's working.

The building schedule fostered a natural collaborative environment within the Lake School.

Participant Two explained that this overlapping time also allows for brief discussions about curriculum:

So that I think we have really benefited because I like had no idea what third grade does in math. Compared to second grade math, there is a huge jump. It is unbelievably so. I would not have known this if I did not have lunch with them.

Participant Four explained that even though the structured collaboration time is not always available during the school day, there are other ways for effective collaboration. "I would love for more time. Time to be able to sit, talk, and that's why we've started this Google Classroom. Working (*sic*) on the Lake School Professional Learning Community online to collaborate." Mr. White and the teachers have worked to create a online professional learning community where collaboration and continued professional development using educational journals occurs.

There were three teachers at the Lake School that spoke about how the process of creating SLO's has assisted with embracing collaboration. A student-learning objective (SLO) is a specific measureable goal that a teacher sets for either the entire class or a focus group. This is a mandated process directed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Through this process, there is an initial meeting, a mid-year check in, and a follow-up meeting between the

principal and each individual teacher. Each individual school also has to set a SLO for their student population.

Relationship characteristics of collaboration. The six participants all shared what they felt were important relationship characteristics of collaboration. They used single word responses at times to answer this question. These responses were respect, trust, compassion, openness, and communication . Participant One began by explaining the importance of being open to the people one works with in his school:

If you share ideas, you have to be open. You have to be open to other people's ideas. If you're collaborating, it means that you are not doing it all on your own and the other, I mean, it's a shared responsibility. They have to take into consideration what other people are contributing because they are coming from different backgrounds.

Participant Three followed up that response by explaining that teachers need to be "candid with each other and with whoever is involved with the collaborative discussion. We're learning and trying to figure this out together."

Participants One, Two, and Three at one point during the interview really focused on what does not work in a collaborative environment. They were speaking of teacher leaders within their school. Participant Three explained, "I think they need to be a leader because they are respected not just because they talk louder." They spoke about how it is important for people to listen to one another while collaborating. As Participant One explained, "When they don't listen to our ideas, we won't support that."

Participants Four, Five, and Six opened a dialogue about the need for respect for teachers from their principal. Participant Four expressed about Mr. White:

He respects us as teaching professionals. And (*sic*) deals with us in that manner. There's not I'm an administrator and I know more than you feeling. He's open to conversation. Come to me if you have something that you believe in. Come to me and let's see what we can. It's refreshing and exciting.

During both interview sessions, the teachers expressed that in order for collaboration to exist, they must see the principal as someone who is willing to learn. As Participant Five explained, “A good characteristic is having a good leader who always wants to grow and learn too.” Participant One and Four both used the same phrasing of saying, “We have seen him (Mr. White) grow.” These comments were stated in two different interview sessions, but they were exactly the same phrasing in relation to what those two teachers feel is an important component of collaborative leadership.

Participant Three highlighted that collaboration is not always easy because of the standardized testing in grades three through five at the elementary level. She spoke of the need to keep instructional control of her classroom, “I would not feel this way if I didn’t have that test looming over my head constantly. That score of what you’re getting, publicized for the whole district.” She focused on how collaboration in the realm of co-teaching is a struggle because of this need for control:

So there are times that I have heard of ideas and been like, no. That’s not going to really work because then I don’t know what is happening when they’re teaching that group and I don’t know if they’re getting the instruction in the way that they need it to be given to them. So that’s a downfall of testing. It does make a difference with those scores. They’re so stressful knowing that the score is linked to me.

Participant Two discussed her discomfort with co-teaching collaboration, “So that’s a big problem. You’re not teaching it, it’s on me. Fearful of testing (*sic*).”

Collaborative leadership in practice. There were three teachers that discussed that they feel their environment is collaborative but that collaboration does not exist within all schools in their district. Participant Four said, “With our district grade-level meetings, I think that also kind of puts it into perspective like what the different administrators are doing in different buildings.” Participant Four continued by explaining, “You don’t see that (collaboration) in many schools.”

Participants One and Two discussed their experiences in other schools where teachers were not open to collaboration. The teachers would not share resources or ideas. Participant One explained, “You ask to borrow something and they’ll say, ‘I don’t know. I don’t know if I really want to share with you.’ People don’t share with anybody else.” Participant Two stated, “I think that we’re fortunate to work in a collaborative school. It’s a good school.” Participant Four expanded on this thought by expressing that even at Lake School previously, collaboration did not exist:

In the past, under other administrators, it was very, well, let me check first. Let me check downtown. I am not sure that we can do that. I am not sure that that’s allowed. I am not sure. With him, it you can kind of sell him that this idea is good for kids, he’s fine with it. And (*sic*) that’s been very refreshing.

Participant One shared how the school wide positive behavior plan at Lake School has been an on-going collaborative process. A school-wide positive behavior support plan is a token economy where all members of the school have the same set of expectations and then when students meet these expectations, they receive the token. She expressed that collaboration in this process has assisted students:

Well even that behavior chart that we started using. I picked that up from other teachers. We ran it off and we shared it. We are all doing the same thing. So all of the kids know that in every classroom, their expectations are the same.

Participant Two supported this by adding, “I think it’s a true sharing of ideas for the general benefit of the kids.”

Three of the six Lake School participants highlighted that a recent professional development session was effective due to the collaborative process. Participant One explained, “One of the things that I really appreciate that we have been able to do the last couple of years is that when we have our staff development, sometimes we have some time that we actually can come together with our team and share ideas.” Participant Three followed that up by stating, “I

think that our last staff development day was probably the most beneficial of them all just because it was designed by us of what we need in our building.” Participant One further explained the following:

It was varied with our faculty. It wasn’t like bringing in people that had no connection with us. It was people here in the building that all work together. And (*sic*) it made a lot more sense to do it here and get everybody’s input on things rather than just have a few people run with something.

When asked how an outsider knows that this was a collaborative environment, the participants at Lake School considered the sense that one would feel walking throughout the school. Participant Six affirmed, “It’s a warm, welcoming feeling.” She elaborated by saying, “Even if you walk into the faculty room, everybody is talking. We’re sharing about ourselves. We’re happy to be here.” Participant Four followed up by explaining that there are no complaining sessions. Then, Participant Three explained that within the building, “There is a lack of gossip. I don’t hear those conversations that go on in this building, but it’s not about each other. We’re talking about the kids and problem solving. We’re collaborating.”

Participant One further elaborated on Participant Three’s comments:

Well, I think that you would see teachers in the faculty room, you’d see teachers talking together not just about what they did on the weekends, but they talk about kids. They talk about lessons. They talk about ideas. I think that before school, you’d see a lot of teachers popping in and out of other classrooms, touching bases. They’re sharing. They want to see what you’re going to do today.

All six of the participants from the Lake School confirmed that an outsider would be able to recognize collaboration because of the visual involvement of all staff members dealing with students and various situations. Participant Four explained, “The responsibility, the bus, the hall, getting the kids off of the bus, the monitoring of the cafeteria, all of our aides and staff are involved every morning, every day at dismissal. It’s what you see.”

Mountain School. Just as with the Lake School, there were two interview sessions at the Mountain School with three teacher participants per session. To protect their identity and allow for confidentiality, the researcher has assigned these participants numbers to replace their names. These participants will be referred to as Participants One through Six. Each of these participants has been a teacher within this school for over four years, with careers in the district spanning a minimum of eight years.

Current leadership style. All six of the participants at Mountain School expressed that they felt the current leadership style was one of calmness. They expressed this in different ways. Participant One was perhaps the most clear, “He’s (Mr. Brown) very laid. He doesn’t breathe down our necks or order people to do things.” Participant Five explained, “he sets a tone in the building of focusing on students.” Participant Three also used the word tone to explain Mr.

Brown:

He sets a tone, by the way that he works , by the way that he handles discipline. How he interacts with the teachers (*sic*). Clear expectations (*sic*). He’s a supporter that mediates between teachers and parents. His positive mood affects the building.

After some other comments, Participant Three explained, “I want to go back to how we said that he sets the tone. I think that his character is important. His beliefs somehow enter into his leadership. I have seen this in how he interacts.”

Participant One commented that she does not believe he has intentionally set up a defined leadership style but just leads based on who Mr. Brown is as a person, “But it feels like that’s his personality. This is who is as a person so that’s his leadership style. He’s just like that.”

Participant Five described Mr. Brown as, “Personal. I would that that’s the most important thing in an elementary school.”

Participant Five explained that she believes Mr. Brown has a specific approach of balancing being firm with understanding, “Balance. He has a balance. I think that he’s approachable. It’s not like you feel intimidated to have a discussion with him.” Participant Three echoed that sentiment in explaining her thoughts of Mr. Brown’s leadership:

But then there’s a sense of serious. To me there is. You know, we do feel as adults that he’s approachable but he always looks the same to me. Like his expression and his serious enough expressing but there’s enough kindness in there that you’re not afraid. And (*sic*) he always looks professional as well. So I think for the children, he looks like a leader. That way and for the adults, you understand that he’s a friendly type of person but you know, he’s not going to be overly friendly and inappropriate. It’s not going to be that way.

Establishment of collaborative leadership. Participant One spoke about how there were specific monthly meetings that the faculty needed to attend. Beyond that, she discussed that collaboration amongst her colleagues was just more natural. She said, “Because we have similar styles. But, we all have a really good grasp because we’ve been here long enough to know what needs to be done. We don’t compete with each other. We just share. It works.” Participant Six echoed that statement in explaining the collaboration exists organically, “I think that people just talking in the hallway, constantly.” Participant Five elaborated further explaining that collaboration has been established within her school:

Probably formally and informally (*sic*). I mean a lot of informal conversations and during faculty meetings. I just think that the tone that has been set just enables us to all realize that, me personally, I feel like we’re all on the same playing field. It’s not like Mr. Brown has acted like I am the boss, you need to do as a I say. It’s like we’re all in it together.

Participant Six expanded that collaboration happens during meetings, but there are also other times:

We have two mandatory meetings a month and a faculty meeting. So actually, three. But then, I mean collaboration especially amongst grade levels. We are constantly doing this in the mornings, on our way to lunch, at lunch, on the way to recess, on our way from buses. It’s constant.

There were two teachers at the Mountain School that spoke about how the process of creating SLO's has assisted with embracing collaboration. As Participant Four explained, "SLO's have a big push this year and last year. So, all of us are working together to meet those goals. That has been something the whole school has collaborated on."

Two of the six participants spoke about how collaboration was built into their daily schedule. Participant One explained about the schedule:

Common planning times (*sic*). We have that now even in this grade. It is with or without special education. It's nice to know that if I need something from another teacher in my grade, we can talk about during this time. We all have the same planning period so it helps. And (*sic*) we've had that for the past couple of years.

All six participants agreed that they feel that Mr. Brown has fostered a collaborative environment within the Mountain School. Participant Five expressed it best, "I think that we are all working together to move forward in the right direction."

Relationship characteristics of collaboration. Four of the six participants specifically stated open communication as an important characteristic for collaboration. Then, the other two concurred without adding additional comments. Participant One explained what she feels is important for communication:

I believe in open communication. You need to be easy to talk to. You need to be able to talk openly with your teaching partners and your principal. I feel that I am easy to talk to and so is everyone else on my team. Our principal is easy to talk too.

Participant Three expressed the need for clear communication of expectations "That's why if it's operationally defined. Clear and concise expectations (*sic*). There's no misconceptions or assumptions of what to do or not to do. We all know what we are working toward."

The participants agreed that they need a leader who fosters openness in an effective collaborative environment. Participant Six stated that the principal needs to be, "open-minded.

You need to feel like you are being listened to.” Participant One further explained that collaboration occurs best, “With someone who is open (*sic*). Someone who is open-minded and has an open-door policy.”

Several participants at the Mountain School spoke of the importance of all people in their school community being invested in the students’ success. Participant One explained, “I think that every person needs to be invested in the school. Everybody needs to really believe in the school. The students, the staff, the parents, they all need to be invested in order for collaboration to happen.”

Participant Three spoke about the need for a respect within the school community:

There must be a school culture of respect for voices and different opinions. And (*sic*) at least hearing the people even if they can’t or don’t support them. Saying that they feel like we can say those things in a safe environment.

The two other participants in this interview session confirmed that respect is an important aspect of an effective collaborative environment.

Collaborative leadership in practice. There are many situations where the participants highlighted collaboration. Participant One explained, “Administration and the teachers are working together constantly to make sure that instruction and curriculum are being followed consistently.”

Special education is a situation that the teachers highlighted as naturally leading to collaboration because there must be open communication between the teachers to ensure that student needs are met. Participant One highlighted this by explaining about her experience:

For many years, I worked with special education teachers so that would be where my experience with collaboration began. I have worked with inclusion special education and pull out special education. We would work together on instruction and how to deal with specific students. It was constant collaboration.

When asked how an outsider would recognize this school as a collaborative environment, Participant One explained, “I don’t know. I just feel like you could feel the presence in the school. The way that the staff treats each others, speaks to each other.”

All of the six participants of the Mountain School discussed that collaboration is evident through their school-wide positive behavior support plan. Participant Two said this about the positive behavior support program:

You’ll see people passing out tickets, whether it’s the lunch room monitors, the bus drivers, the teacher. Then, you’ll see teachers giving other classrooms tickets. That’s showing that we collaborate and we are all on board with the same type of behavior system.

Participant Four also addressed the positive behavior support program in the following manner:

I think visually, if you look around the building, you will see the school-wide positive behavior rules that are posted outside of most people’s classrooms and throughout the halls or inside our classrooms. That’s a big way that we collaborate. That would be visually recognizable.

Final Comments on Findings

Through the principal and teacher interviews, both groups were able to give detailed examples of how collaboration is effective within their school setting. They were able to point to specific situations where collaborative efforts are evidenced and successful. Through their responses, all 12 of the teachers expressed a certain authenticity to collaboration. The following figure depicts the nature of collaboration within both schools (Figure 4.3). There were two areas of natural occurrence through conversation and formal meetings where all 12 participants agreed collaboration existed within their schools. They expressed that collaboration is evidenced during shared planning time and student-learning objectives. Through their experiences in collaboration in each of their respective schools, the principals and teachers were able to share their perspectives on the social context of a collaborative leadership environment.

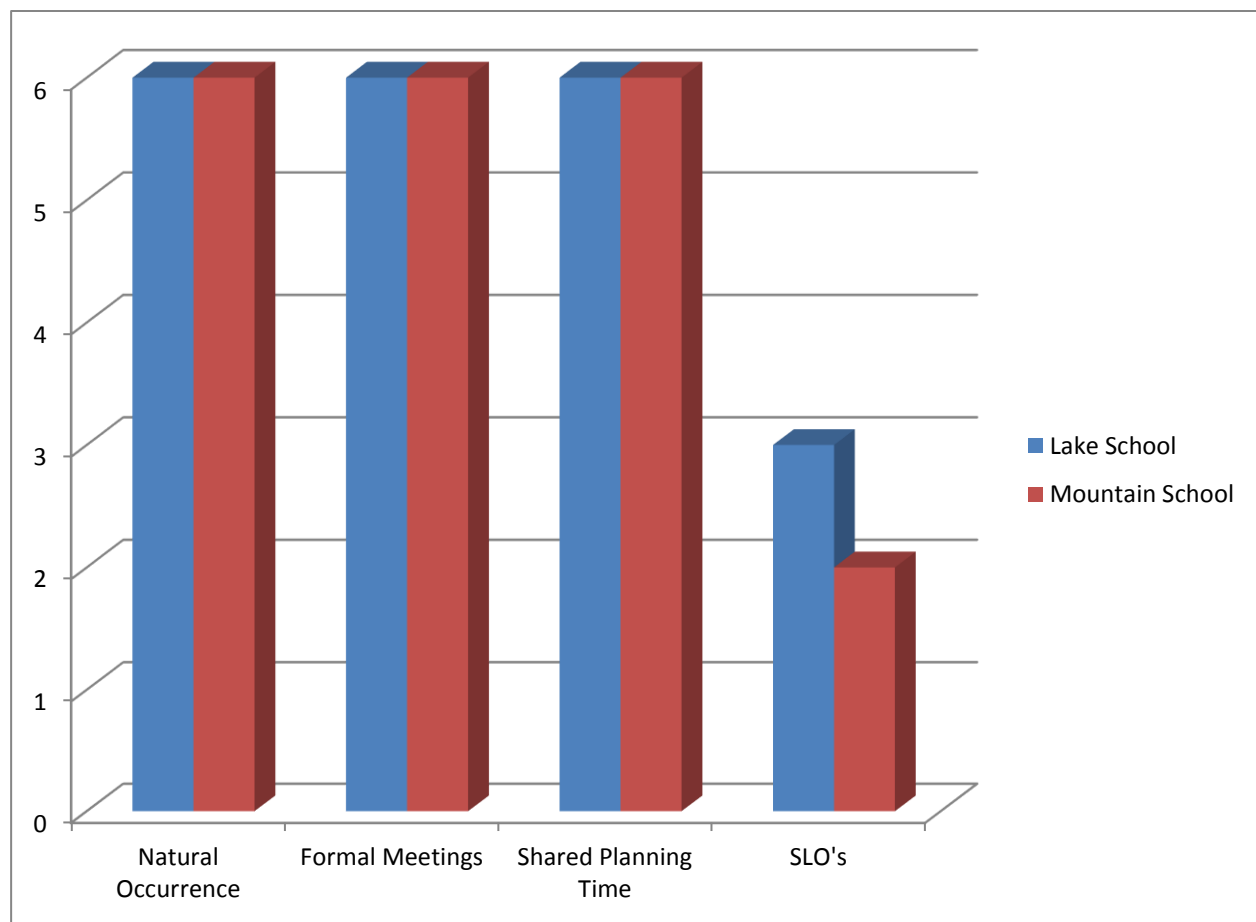


Figure 4.3: Teacher's Experience in Collaborative Leadership

Results and Interpretations

Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of social interactions dealing with collaboration in an elementary school setting and the perceptions that principals and teachers hold about the collaborative leadership process. The participant responses allowed the researcher to answer the research questions in this phenomenological qualitative study. This was achieved through answering the central question of how the principal establishes relationships with the teachers to foster a collaborative environment within an elementary school setting in a school district located in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Understanding the perceptions based

around collaboration will assist the principals in more effective leading a collaborative environment and will assist the teachers in engaging in that collaboration.

Principal one-on-one interviews. Through these two one-on-one interview sessions, four main themes emerged of what is necessary to create a collaborative leadership environment: (a) caring, (b) generative listening, (c) nonjudgmental trust, and (d) involvement (See Figure 4.4). These themes will be clearly defined within each outlined section.



Figure 4.4: Principals' Collaborative Leadership Perspectives

Empathy. During the interviews, both principals discussed the importance of being empathetic with their faculty and staff members. Empathy is the ability to understand and relate to other's feelings, needs, and / or concerns (Merriam Webster, 2016). Both principals established the need for a high level of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) regarding empathic leadership. Although there were only a few comments made regarding empathy, this was a common discussion in both interview sessions. They reflected that it is necessary to care about the individual as a whole, not just the professional. As Mr. White explained, "It's through actually caring. And (*sic*) not just about education and not just about their job, about their families. Recognizing they have a difficult time of things as well." According to both principals, empathy with the faculty and staff regarding both the professional and personal arenas is crucial to establishing a collaborative environment. Fullan (2001) explains through meta-research that "Principals and teachers will only be mobilized by caring and respect" (p. 63). Both principals report that having the emotional intelligence of empathy is necessary social context of collaborative leadership.

Generative listening. Both principals talked about the importance of listening to their teachers and staff members. They discussed that it is not just listening, but listening to understand what the problems and concerns are in each situation. Both feel that communication is an integral part of collaborative leadership. They both independently spoke about the need for a high-level of listening.

As examined in Chapter Two, Scharmer (2009) theorizes about the various levels of listening. He would refer to these levels spoken about by Mr. White and Mr. Brown as generative listening. Generative listening is the highest level of listening on Scharmer's continuum where stakeholders are able to "connect at a deeper source – to the source of who you

really are and to a sense of why you are here” (p. 13). Mr. Brown highlights that when both parties are listening to one another (the teachers and the principals), they must have an open mind to sincerely hear and understand the information being shared. Mr. White’s discussions really focused on the importance of being an active participant in discussion to work alongside the faculty and staff member with the concerns for a resolution. Without using the terms of Scharmer’s *Theory U* (2009), both principals were able to identify the need for this higher-level listening skill.

Nonjudgmental trust. The theme of trust was the most frequently discussed theme within both interviews with the principals. They talked about the importance of teachers feeling trusted within each of their schools. Each principal took trust to another level. Mr. White explained, “Trust is the ability to make mistakes and not be chastised for them.” As Mr. Brown further explained, collaborative leadership is “letting them build up a trust. Let them know that you are working with them. You’re not out there in an ‘I gotcha (*sic*)’ sort of atmosphere.” This level of trust is a nonjudgmental trust where teachers have the freedom to try new ideas without feeling nervous of the repercussions in an evaluation. Mr. Brown stated, “I never throw anybody under the bus so they are more willing to discuss with me their ideas and thoughts on things.”

Mr. White spoke in depth about the need to empower faculty and staff to be innovative and creative in how they approach instruction. He explained that this innovation could only happen when teachers feel that they are trusted in a nonjudgmental atmosphere. Mr. White explained, “People cannot be afraid to take risks in an environment where we are all learning.”

Both of the principals explained that trust takes time to build. It is not just present when one begins his / her leadership role. Mr. White felt that trust “naturally builds.” Mr. Brown

echoed that sentiment in explaining that trust must build between a faculty / staff and its leader. It does not just happen, but it built over time through support and open discussions.

Mr. Brown explained that the key to creating a trust environment is to show the teachers that the principal believes they are professionals making positive choices for student. He stated, “I don’t really interfere with what they’re doing. They’re teachers. They know best what they should be going on in their classroom without my interference. And (*sic*) I give them the freedom to experiment and try different things.”

According to both Mr. Brown and Mr. White, trust is a two-way street. It is important for the teachers to feel trusted to be creative with the delivery of instruction, but it is also important for them to trust their leader. Again, they both highlighted this builds over time. Mr. White reflected on how he was able to get his faculty and staff to trust him and his decision-making ability:

I did the things that I do to make you trust me, to help you trust in me. And (*sic*) actually not to make you, but help you trust me. And (*sic*) see the sincerity of my efforts and what I truly am focused on. They see the transparency in my agenda.

Both principals discussed that the teachers need to feel trusted in their decisions and the principals need to have the trust of the faculty and staff in order for any change to occur. Trust is a mutually established social context.

Mr. Brown and Mr. White supported Fullan’s (2001) research about the importance of establishing trust within an environment of change. Fullan explores that stakeholders, in this case teachers and principals, need to rely on one another and their ideas on a constant basis while making change. That reliance is built within the social context of trust. In a trusting environment, stakeholders feel more comfortable to take risks and be innovative in their craft (Padilla, 2009).

Involvement. Having a presence within the building was an area that Mr. Brown and Mr. White addressed as important in creating the social context of collaborative leadership. As Mr. Brown explained a collaborative school leader needs to “visit the rooms as often as you can. Help out. Be seen at events (*sic*). Being visible and having an open door for them to come in and speak (*sic*).” Mr. White took this thought a step further by exploring the thought that when a principal is involved and invested in a school, he / she is then able to learn from the teachers. Mr. White conveyed that in order to have the ability to learn from the teachers within the building, the principal must be an active participant in the culture.

Teacher focus-group interviews. Through the teacher responses to the interview questions (See Appendix C), there were five strong themes: (a) caring, (b) generative listening, (c) nonjudgmental trust, (d) involvement, and (e) respect (see Figure 4.5).



Figure 4.5: Teachers' Collaborative Leadership Perspectives

These are similar themes to the principals' responses with the addition of the theme of respect. Throughout the interviews, the 12 teacher participants shared their perspective on what relationship characteristics they feel are necessary for effective collaboration. There were these common five themes. Figure 4.6 details how these themes were shared among Lake and Mountain Schools.

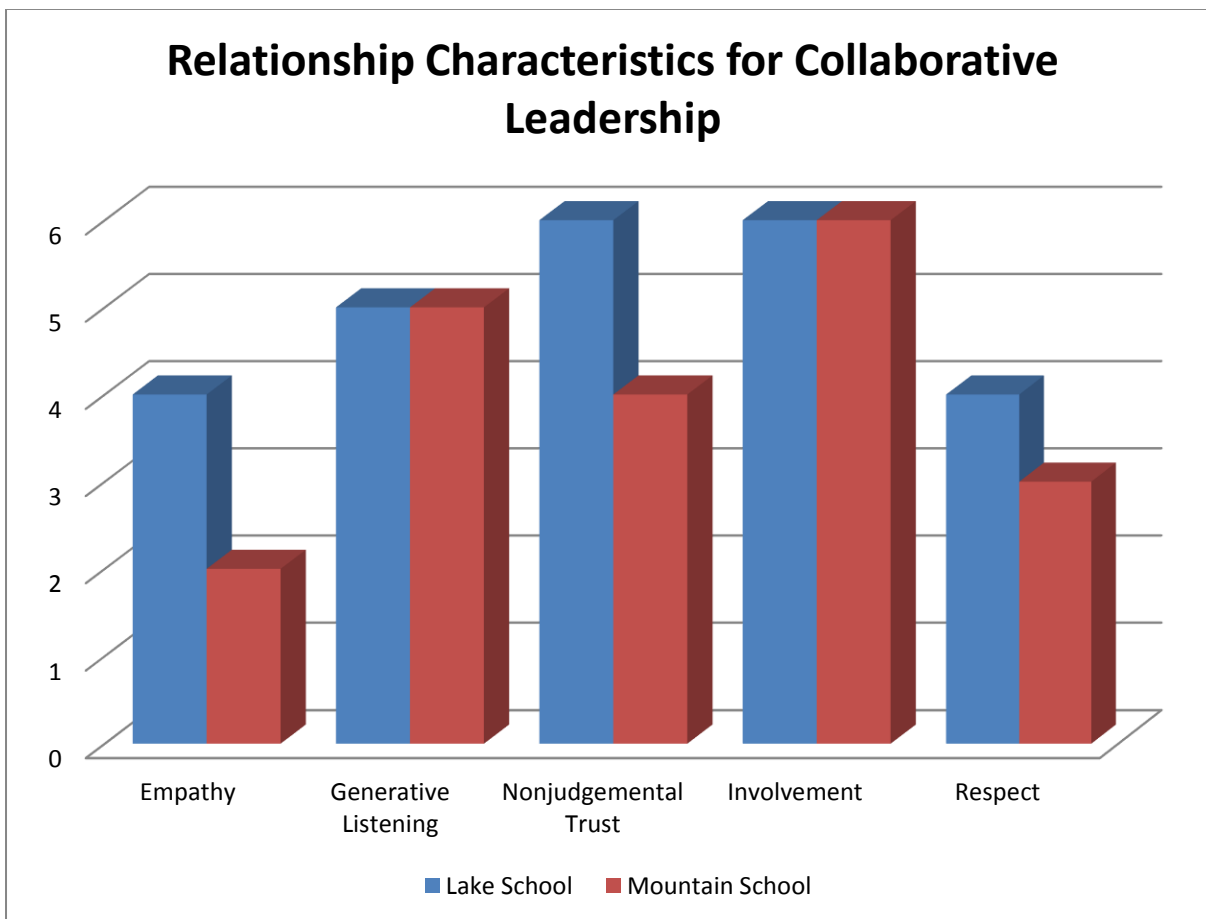


Figure 4.6: Teachers' Perspectives of Relationship Characteristics for Collaborative Leadership

Empathy. In a similar fashion to the principal interviews, the teachers only made a few comments regarding the need for empathy, but it was still a common theme between both principals and six of the teachers. Lake School Participant Six went in depth about the importance of the principals' being able to recognize the "human component of teaching." He gave examples of how during data meetings reviewing state assessment data, the principal

expressed that he understands they are disappointed because they are not where they as a faculty want to be, but they are above the state average. Comments like this, as expressed by Lake School Participant Six, show that the principal understands what the teachers are feeling and is able to address those concerns on an emotional level. Lake School Participant Six continued to explain that the principal provided “comfort in the fact of what our position is in the state and in the local kind of communities.”

This participant then went into a lengthy discussion about the many responsibilities of principals within his district. He expressed a sincere concern for the principal becoming burnt out because of the vast responsibilities that he holds. Through this discussion, this participant highlighted that empathy is a necessary mutual social interaction. During the Mountain School interviews, the participants spoke about the need for empathy and gentleness when dealing with teachers and students. In that interview, Mountain School Participant Five echoed Lake School Participant Six’s stance by explaining that it is important for the teachers to show empathy towards the principal as well, “I imagine it’s hard for him to make tough decisions.” Being empathetic is a reciprocal common social context for both the teachers and the principals during these interview sessions.

Generative listening. Ten of the 12 participants expressed the need for having an open mind and the ability to listen to members of the school as an important social context. Eight of the teacher participants used the same term where both the principals and teachers need to be open-minded during dialogue, planning, and discussions.

During the Lake School’s first interview, Participant Two discussed an upcoming parent night:

Let’s get together as a group and figure out what we want. Let’s discuss your ideas and bounce ideas off of each other and share the responsibility of coming up with you know

things like our parent night that he wants. It's like ok, let's get together as a group and figure out what we want to do and we're really in charge of that.

Mountain School Participant Three explained that "individuals need to be open to hearing other's ideas and not closed-minded." Lake School Participant Four explained that it is crucial for the principal to having open discussions where he understands that he does not have all of the answers. She reviewed several situations where her principal went to the faculty for their advice because he did not know the answer. The principal wants their input because he wants shared decision-making where all of the professionals are working together for a solution. Just as with empathy, generative listening is a mutual relationship component.

The teacher participants really highlighted the need for a high-level of listening that Scharmer (2009) depicts in his fourth level of listening: generative listening. They were able to give various scenarios where the principals approached them with concerns or problems and sincerely wanted their input. They were also very aware that as teachers, they felt they needed to have that same level of listening skill to understand their principal. The participant's feedback supported the research conducted by Kramer and Crespy (2011) highlighting the importance of a high level of listening to all stakeholders within an organization.

Nonjudgmental trust. When discussing collaboration, ten out of the teacher participants stated that trust is a crucial component necessary for collaboration in any environment. Many of the comments were in conjunction with the previous two themes of empathy and generative listening. One teacher explained that trust is built when teachers know that the principal will be listening and understanding. Lake School Participant One thoroughly explained that when approaching the principal with a concern, she needs to be able to trust that he will be understanding, attentive in listening, and trusting that she is making the right choice. Each of the ten that spoke about trust highlighted that they are there to make decisions based on what is best

for the students. Much of the conversation was based around parent complaints to the principal. The teacher participants want the principals to trust that they know is best for their students and then work together to gain that parent's trust. Through the principals' support with parent concerns, they feel that the principal is trusting their decision-making abilities.

Lake School Participant Six discussed that he feels more comfortable in his classroom to be creative and innovative because that level of trust exists between him and his principal. They are both able to bounce ideas off one another. Then, through those discussions, Lake School Participant Six feels that he is able to devise creative manners in which to best address student needs. He explained about the level of support he receives from his principal:

Experiment, push the boundaries and then they (principals) help support them (teachers) maybe in their areas of weakness to try to strengthen those. And (*sic*) to be an encourager especially in the day and age, we kind of get beat up a lot and so to have an administrator who appears to be supportive and on your side and someone who is not just looking at this report and hammering you about it.

Lake School Participant Five explained that with the principal treating the teachers as professionals and trusting them to make good instructional decisions, "He's seeing a spark in the kids. He's seeing teacher morale go up. The general overall morale of the school improves." Each participant expressed a sense of ease in the trusting environment that has been created by his or her principal.

As with the previous social contexts outlined by the teachers, the teachers were clear that trust is a mutual relationship component. Lake School Participant Four explained, "We've learned to grow with him and trust him. And he worked with us. I am going to make these changes, but if you see anything that I can fix or change, we'll discuss it." This comment was dealing with a change in the building schedule. The principal was overhauling the schedule, which the teachers found to be uncomfortable. However, they trusted that he knew what he was

doing to make a more efficient schedule. In addition, he trusted them enough for them to offer feedback to improve the schedule. Trust is reciprocal social context that these participants felt was necessary for collaborative leadership.

Involvement. All 12 of the teacher participants expressed that in order for there be a collaborative environment, the principal must be actively involved in the school. They spoke about the need for involvement in three different manners: (a) logistics, (b) setting the tone, and (c) understanding the culture of the school. First, the participants described that the principal needs to be involved and present for the logical reasons of availability. They cannot have conversations with him without him being available. As Mountain School Participant Three explained, “Being available to communicate with. Just popping in the room (*sic*).” The teachers expressed how busy their days are and it is helpful when the principal is either out in the building for conversations or has an open-door policy where they can stop by when they have the time.

Secondly, four participants spoke about the principal setting the tone of the school through his involvement. Mountain School Participant Three explained that the principal “sets the tone by the way he works, how he handles discipline, how he interacts with the teachers, and his expectations.” Through the principal’s actions and involvement, he is the role model for how all people within the school should interact. He is able to set the tone for the school with his active involvement. Lake School Participant Four explained that through Mr. White’s leadership style, he sets the tone for learning in his school:

I believe that his style of leadership falls under the term transformational leadership. He wants to make this place, this family, this community of learners, be what it should be. And by empowering others, by empowering the students, by being connected as he is, he is transforming the environment within the school and really making it better, positive. It’s just really exciting to see how he is changing the culture.

Through the principals' connectedness, both are able to collaborate effectively to make change.

Thirdly, five of the participants discussed the importance of being involved to better understand the culture of the students, parents, and teachers. During the first Lake School interview, the teachers spoke about how strong their teaching teams were. Lake School Participant One explained that they are strong because the principal understand whom they are as professionals and their personalities, "You have to know how your people are thought of by their peers. Just to make your own evaluation of who everybody is isn't enough. You have to know how they will interact." The other participants in that interview agreed with this statement from Lake School Participant One explaining that there are some teachers who have inflated self-perceptions and it is crucial for the principal to recognize the actual strengths and weaknesses of the faculty and staff. In the same manner, Mountain School Participant Five explained her principal "has an appropriate sense of who our students are." In order for the principal to be collaborative, the participants felt that he must be actively involved.

The participant responses reinforce the research conducted by Black (2010) and Butler (2007) in the need for active involvement by all stakeholders to create a supportive, productive environment. Collaboration exists when all stakeholders demonstrate ownership in being actively involved within the organization, specifically a school.

Respect. Seven of the 12 participants spoke about the need for mutual respect in a collaborative leadership environment. Lake School Participant Two discussed that within the faculty, leaders arise because "they are respected, not just that they volunteer." A leader must "lead respectfully of other people" in order for it to be effective. Lake School Participant One highlighted that the leader must respect those around him / her and in kind, those working with that leader must be respected. Lake School Participant One then spoke about the need for the

principal to treat the entire faculty with respect. She reflected on various situations where previous administrators would send e-mails to the entire faculty chastising them for specific behaviors when it was only a select few; “He deals with it more on an individual basis rather than punishing everyone. I shouldn’t say punish, but mandate everyone just because somebody isn’t doing something.” When the participants spoke about creating a respectful atmosphere, they highlighted the previous themes addressed within the section of (a) caring, (b) generative listening, (c) nonjudgmental trust, and (d) involvement. They felt that these relationship characteristics are necessary for a respectful and collaborative leadership environment. Fullan (2001) and Kotter (2012) both support the need for a respectful environment in order for productive change to be possible.

Final Comments on Results

Both the principals and teachers agree that in order to create a positive collaborative environment, the principal must be an active caring member in the school culture who demonstrates a high level of listening and nonjudgmental trust. All of the participants supported that these relationship characteristics build over time by the principal’s actions and interactions with teachers, students, and parents. Each of the teacher participants expressed that the principal must hold these relationship characteristics but the teachers must as well. All 12 of the participants at varying points during the interview sessions expanded that the teachers must help to create this social context by maintaining the same relationship characteristics. This supports Cashman’s (2014) Leading by Convening process where the stakeholders first have to share their perspectives and understand one another. From there, they are able to move forward to work toward a common, shared vision.

This research study has two sub-questions to support the central question addressed previously. These sub-questions explored what characteristics of social interactions principals feel are important for an effective collaborative environment and then the same for what characteristics teachers feel are important. Interestingly enough, the responses of these social characteristics were aligned with the principal and teacher responses, except for one. The researcher created these sub-questions for this purpose of comparing and contrasting the responses of the principals and those of the teachers. As discussed throughout this chapter, the teachers and principals agree that the characteristics of social interactions necessary for an effective collaborative environment as the following: (a) caring, (b) generative listening, (c) trust, and (d) involvement. The teachers added an additional characteristic of respect necessary for collaborative leadership. The teacher participants explained the importance of respect in a collaborative environment. It must be noted that the principals never spoke directly of respect as a necessary component. This is the only theme that does not align with what both participant groups share.

Interpretations

Collaborative characteristics. Using the interview protocols for both principals and teachers (see Appendices B and C), the researcher asked probing, but open-ended questions regarding the characteristics of collaborative leadership and collaboration in general. The four character traits were common themes throughout each of the interview sessions. They became apparent to the researcher through the coding process. This phenomenological research allowed the researcher to better understand the social context of collaboration. There was only one theme, respect, which differed among the principal and teacher responses.

Through these discussions, it became evident, that these five relationship characteristics are interdependent on one another. A principal cannot engage in generative listening without caring about his teachers and students or being an active member of that school community. Teachers cannot have that honest, open dialogue with their principal without trusting him or her.

Understanding the context of collaboration. In previous chapters, the researcher created a visual of what is necessary for collaborative leadership (see Figure 4.7). This visual was based on research compiled throughout Chapter Two. The figure shows that collaborative leadership is built based on stakeholder involvement and then shared responsibility. From there, the next building blocks are communication and respect. Finally, a shared vision caps the building blocks for a collaborative organization.

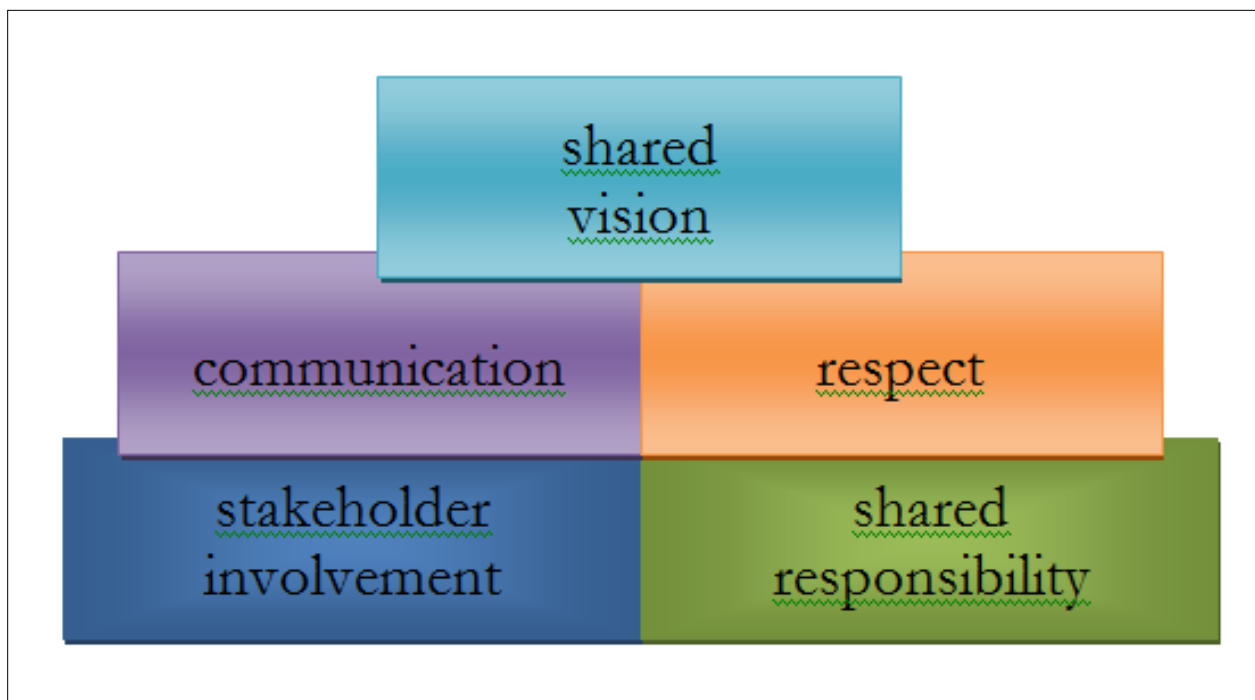


Figure 4.7: The Building Blocks of Collaborative Leadership

The researcher believes that these five components must exist within a collaborative leadership and that they interact with one another. However, the visual has changed to highlight the relationship components necessary for collaboration. Figure 4.8 depicts the relationship

characteristics that create the social context of collaborative leadership. The figure emphasizes that these characteristics are linked together creating this collaborative environment. Should one of the links be missing, the entire chain falls apart. Together, these five characteristics can build a collaborative leadership environment.



Figure 4.8: The Chain of Relationships within Collaborative Leadership (Source: Shemansky, 2017)

The intention of this research study was to focus on the problem where there needs to be an understanding of what both principals and teachers perceive as the key characteristics of

social interactions needed to facilitate a collaborative leadership system. Through this qualitative research study, the findings address this problem and allow for a more thorough understanding of the perceptions held by teachers and principals regarding the important characteristics of collaboration. The teachers and principals discussed that same set of relationship characteristics as crucial for an effective collaborative environment. The only differing characteristic was respect, which was not widely discussed by either principal during the one-on-one interviews. The commonality in these themes shared by both stakeholder groups reinforces this research study in defining the necessary social context for collaborative leadership to be effective.

This research highlights that these relationship characteristics are those necessary components for an effective collaborative leadership because they were the common themes in all six interview sessions. Each interview focused around these four common themes which support that both the principals and the teachers are in agreement with the necessary components.

In reflecting and reviewing the teacher responses, perhaps they were similar because all of the teachers were involved in an already established collaborative leadership environment. Collaboration is a common practice within these schools so their similarities in responses emphasize the true relationship characteristics necessary for collaborative leadership.

Respect disparity. Respect is such a widely discussed component in almost all effective leadership styles. It is intriguing that neither principal highlighted this as a necessary trait for collaborative leadership. The researcher's stance is that the principals just did not state what they feel is the obvious. These principals are veteran building-level principals with having over ten years overall experience leading public education schools. The researcher believes that the

lack of direct discussion based around respect was truly just an oversight, not an indicator that either principal does not value the importance of respect within the school community. Because of this disparity, the researcher reached out to both Mr. White and Mr. Brown after analyzing their feedback in comparison to the teachers. Both of the principals were surprised that they never specifically mentioned respect during their interview sessions. Mr. White explained that he feels his teachers focused heavily on respect because it perhaps did not always exist within their school:

My thoughts go immediately to a broad statement or feeling that teachers do not or have not felt appreciated for their skills as they have had handed down to them directive after directive, program after program and hence they do not feel valued which is a key component in the definition of respect. Typical top down (*sic*). I sense this because I have teachers who say I am different than others as I let them try things outside of the dictated box.

Both Mr. White and Mr. Brown expressed the same sentiment that respect is to them the obvious manner in which they lead their respective schools. Figure 4.9 highlights the principals' sentiment that respect is embedded into all of these characteristics and lies in the background. Because respect sits in the background of all of these relationship characteristics, it was not specifically discussed during the principal interviews.



Figure 4.9: Principals' Perspectives of Relationship Characteristics for Collaborative Leadership with Respect in the Background

They did not speak of respect directly because it is embedded into all of their actions and their leadership. Mr. White and Mr. Brown both expressed that respect is the cornerstone to their leadership.

Summary

During each of the six interview sessions with the principals and teachers, they shared what they felt was necessary in the social context of collaborative leadership. From these responses, it is clear that collaborative leadership comes from a principal who inherently believes in respecting the faculty he / she works with and trusting them to make positive choices for students. As Mr. White expressed, “You can’t have a top-down authoritative position, in my

opinion and still expect collaboration. I like that people think that I am working right alongside of them.”

With all of these 12 teacher participants and the two principal participants having already established collaborative leadership environments, they were each able to reflect on actual personal experiences as a reference to the important relationship characteristics necessary for collaborative leadership to be sustained. These characteristics of (a) empathy, (b) generative listening, (c) nonjudgmental trust, (d) involvement, and (e) respect all link together to create the necessary social context for collaborative leadership.

Chapter 5

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the perceptions of social interactions dealing with collaboration in an elementary school setting. This research study explored the perceptions of elementary school principals and teachers in order to best understand the social context necessary for effective collaborative leadership. The research investigated the practical implementation of collaborative leadership. With the feedback given from two elementary principals and 12 elementary teachers within two schools from the same district, in Northeastern Pennsylvania, the researcher was able to answer the research questions of what characteristics both principals and teachers feel are crucial for an effective collaborative leadership process.

This research went beyond looking at what was on the surface of the interactions in each elementary school. Using Senge's (2004) Iceberg Model, the researcher was able to go below the surface of the interactions to understand the social context created and the relationship characteristics that foster effective collaboration (Figure 5.1). This in-depth analysis will allow elementary school leaders to properly create the social context of collaborative leadership.

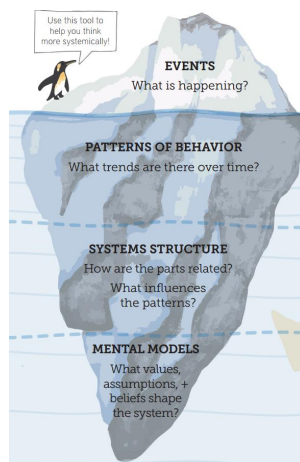


Figure 5.1: The Iceberg Model. (Donella, 2016).

This final chapter will contain four sections. The first section will provide a summary of the qualitative phenomenological study implemented to understand the social context of collaborative leadership. The second section will explore the conclusions of this study and how the research questions were answered. The third section will then pose recommendations for how educators and researchers can proceed forward. The final section will provide an overall summary of the research conducted and the impact it has on creating an effective collaborative leadership environment.

Overview of the Study

This qualitative research study involved six various interview sessions to understand the social context of collaborative leadership. As outlined in Chapter Two, collaborative leadership can be an effective leadership style to ensure that all stakeholders in the school community are working toward a common goal and shared vision (Kotter, 2012). Throughout the research study, two principal participants engaged in one-on-one interviews and 12 teacher participants engaged in four independent focus-group interviews with three participants in each interview session. During these interviews, the researched utilized the protocols (Appendices B and C) to explore the relationship characteristics necessary for an effective collaborative leadership. The transcribed interviews were coded based on the trends and themes apparent in the participant responses. There were four common themes within the principals' interviews and five common in the teacher interviews. When comparing those themes, four of them overlap between the principals and teachers. Those universal themes were (a) empathy, (b) generative listening, (c) nonjudgmental trust, and (d) involvement (Figure 5.2).



Figure 5.2: Universal Collaborative Leadership Characteristics

The sole theme not common in the interviews was specific to the teacher responses: respect. In follow-up discussions with the principals, they expressed that respect to them is second nature thus it was not a characteristic that they specifically focus on since they feel that it is embedded into all aspects of collaboration (Figure 5.3)



Figure 5.3: Principals' Perspectives of Relationship Characteristics for Collaborative Leadership with Respect Embedded in the Background

Thus, the principals agreed that respect was a crucial part of collaborative leadership. Therefore, there were five common themes given through the participants' feedback.

Conclusions

As discussed in Chapter Four, this research study was able to answer the proposed research questions:

1. Central Question: How does the principal establish relationships with the teachers to foster a collaborative environment within an elementary school setting in a school district located in Northeastern Pennsylvania?
 - a. *Sub-question 1*: What characteristics of social interactions do principals feel are important for an effective collaborative environment?
 - b. *Sub-question 2*: What characteristics of social interactions do teachers feel are important for an effective collaborative environment?

The participants provided an in-depth understanding of the social context crucial for an effective collaborative leadership environment.

Both of the principals of these two elementary schools have established a collaborative leadership environment in their school community. The teacher and principal responses highlight actual experiences in collaboration. The participants were not speaking in ambiguous terms about collaboration. They were able to share how collaborative leadership has been effective within their respective schools. The fact that both schools already have an established collaborative leadership environment allowed for the participants to draw on their personal experience in order to best reflect on the necessary social context of collaboration. Their experience working in a collaborative environment provided the strong foundation for this research study in better understanding those critical relationship characteristics necessary to foster collaboration. Without the five relationship characteristics of (a) empathy, (b) generative listening, (c) nonjudgmental trust, (d) respect, and (e) involvement, a collaborative leadership environment cannot be effective. These five characteristics are interdependent on one another and linked together, as depicted in Figure 5.4, creating the social context of collaboration.

Without one of these five components, the chain of collaborative leadership falls apart and effective implementation of collaborative leadership is not possible.



Figure 5.4: The Chain of Relationships within Collaborative Leadership (Source: Shemansky, 2017)

Recommendations

Perceptions of the leadership style were investigated to understand how the principals and teachers view collaboration. This research now contributes to a better understanding of how leaders can implement collaboration into their leadership for effective change and forward movement within the public school setting. The research will help those in elementary school settings understand the contextual social interaction characteristics that both teachers and principals feel are necessary to foster a collaborative environment. By the researcher taking a

deeper look at the perceptions principals and teachers hold regarding the social interactions crucial for effective collaboration, this research enables each stakeholder group to better understand the perceptions of the whole.

Education Leaders

In today's current culture, there are more responsibilities placed on educators to meet student needs. These needs begin with the basic needs of health and wellness and then span from social-emotional to academics. In this environment, collaborative leadership creates a school community focused on a shared vision in addressing and meeting those concerns. Research, as discussed in Chapter Two, shows that collaborative leadership is an effective leadership tool to enact change and ensure that all stakeholders have a common mission. This research conducted in this study outlines for educational leaders, the five specific relationship characteristics necessary to properly foster and support a collaborative leadership environment. As Superintendents are looking at their building-level leadership, they should be making managerial decisions to ensure that their leaders have leadership styles that include the five components of this social context.

Hiring elementary principals. Interestingly enough, the principals in this study reported that these relationship characteristics were not intentional designed or created. Both of the principals feel that they naturally hold these personality traits that then transfer into their leadership style. Thus, as Superintendents replace building-level leadership, they should be looking at candidates that hold these five critical collaborative leadership traits of (a) empathy, (b) generative listening, (c) nonjudgmental trust, (d) respect, and (e) involvement. Since the principals report that they never intentionally sought out a collaborative leadership style, this highlights that these are natural personality characteristics intrinsic within that leader. Thus,

these must be traits embedded within the leader's personality. Then, that leader will embody the necessary social context for collaborative leadership.

Hiring teachers. With the same intention of creating a collaborative leadership environment, as building principals are looking to hire teachers or support staff members, they should be looking for candidates that hold these same five characteristics. Candidates that possess these characteristics will organically be collaborative and thus ensure that collaborative leadership can effectively be established and sustained.

Building schedule. During each of the teacher focus-group interviews, the teachers highlighted the impact that their schedule plays on the ability to collaborate. Both people reported that they have common planning time that enables them to share materials, resources, and ideas. Lake School teachers reported how their overlapping lunch times allow for discussion and collaboration with the grade level below and then above them. The elementary principal must be intuitive enough to design a building schedule that naturally embeds shared times where teachers have the ability to collaborate. As Lake School Participant One explained, "When we have the opportunities to collaborate, just naturally grab them. She further explained that there are significant time constraints throughout the day that causes a barrier to collaboration. Thus, elementary must create a schedule that fosters collaboration through shared planning and / or meeting times throughout the school day.

Principal and teacher meetings. Meetings can take on one of two formats. They can be where the elementary principal or speaker presents information and speaks at the teacher audience. Meetings can also be a collaborative environment where information is discussed freely amongst the elementary principal and teachers. In order to create a supportive collaborative leadership environment, the elementary principal needs to be able to turn control of

the discussion over to the teachers. The elementary principal sets the tone of the meetings in how discussions are held. Elementary principals can use the Leading by Convening Model (Cashman, et al, 2014) in a two-part question process. First, the principal can use reaction questions that set out to understand perspectives of their faculty and staff. Then the principal can follow up with application questions that set a plan moving forward to solve any issues. During these meetings, the elementary principal can share information but then request feedback from the teachers in the building. Meetings can also be structured where the collaborative team of principal and teachers are looking at a concern and develop a plan to address that concern. As the role model for respectful and open dialogue, the elementary principal should foster an environment where meetings are open to suggestions, comments, and questions all working toward the shared vision.

Further Research

Expansion of other school districts. In reviewing this qualitative research study, the sampling of participants was specific to one school district located in Northeastern Pennsylvania. To further generalize this research, a similar study could be conducted to include multiple school districts located in various regions throughout the country. Including multiple site locations could offer varying perspectives from different school districts. This qualitative study focused on one specific school district located in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Although the schools had different leadership at the building level, the central administration leadership was the same. Thus, there is a commonality in what is expected from the principals and teachers from the Superintendent's standpoint. Although the sampling size was not extensive, research supports that 12 in-depth interviews offers a significant amount of insight and information without breaching a data saturation level (Boddy, 2016). Twelve participants in varying school districts

may offer a different perspective on the social context necessary for collaborative leadership since their experiences are different. Their responses could potentially further validate the results of this research study. Their responses may also add other relationship characteristics to the chain of necessary traits for collaboration.

Enrollment size. Both of the elementary schools were similar in enrollment size. As the researcher conducted this research, there was an underlying question that arose. Would there be a difference in collaboration in larger schools. The enrollment of these two selected schools is no more than 550 students. In a larger school with over a thousand students, could collaboration still exist and what relationship characteristics would exist in that environment? Although, one could generalize to say that they would be similar, it would be intriguing to see if a larger-populated faculty and administrative team had a different set of characteristics.

Stakeholder group expansion. In looking to continue this research, this research study should be expanded to include other stakeholder groups. The purpose of this qualitative study was to interact with the principal and the teacher. The principal and teachers offered invaluable insight in to the important relationship characteristics necessary. However, significant stakeholder groups were not included in this research study. To extend this research to better understand a comprehensive collaborative leadership environment, the support staff, parents, local community members, and students could be interviewed. These four stakeholder groups are also important members of the school culture and community. Their responses could offer different perspectives in the social context of collaborative leadership.

Connection to emotional intelligence. Through the literature review, the researcher did not consider the concept of emotional intelligence directly. During the discussions, the researcher realized that there is a direct connection to this research study and emotional

intelligence. Emotional intelligence encompasses many facets of personality traits, but one main component is the “awareness of oneself and others as well as the ability to express emotions and emotional needs properly to other” (Khalili, 2013, p. 2690). This phenomenological qualitative research study drew on the emotional intelligence of both the teachers and principals in order to understand the perceptions of the established social context of collaboration. To continue this research, there should be a thorough meta-analysis through research of the relationship characteristics of emotional intelligence. This then will assist in cementing the collaborative traits as well. In order to collaborate effectively, this researcher believes that there must be a higher level of emotional intelligence for those stakeholders involved for honest, trusting, and respectful dialogue and planning.

Summary

The research focused on the perceptions teachers and principals hold regarding the social context needed for effective collaboration in an elementary school setting. Educators have such massive responsibilities of educating the whole child. Research, as outlined in Chapter Two, shows that collaboration is an effective tool to ensure schools are effective. Thus, it is imperative for educational leaders to understand the social context of collaborative leadership.

With the interlinking five relationship characteristics of (a) empathy, (b) generative listening, (c) nonjudgmental trust, (d) respect, and (e) involvement, collaborative leadership can be an effective leadership style to work toward a shared vision. Elementary school leaders must have a strong understanding of the elementary school’s social context. In order to do this, elementary school leaders must step off the dance floor and view their school community from the balcony (Scharmer, 2009) to have a deeper understanding of the effect their leadership style has on this social context. Although the elementary principals in this study expressed that

collaboration was not intentional, but a part of who they are as leaders, they were able to stand on the balcony to reflect on the relationship characteristics necessary for collaborative leadership. Teachers as well need to stand on the balcony to review their interactions between their colleagues and their building leadership. As Covey (2004) suggest, highly effective people first seek to understand and then to be understood. As expressed in this study, if elementary teachers have a supportive environment, they will embrace collaborative leadership. The environment just needs to be one that fosters collaboration. Now, elementary leaders and teachers can understand the social context necessary for collaboration. This research study offers educational leaders and teachers a better understanding of how to establish a collaborative environment by fostering these five relationship characteristics of (a) empathy, (b) generative listening, (c) nonjudgmental trust, (d) respect, and (e) involvement.

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Appendix A: Concept Map

Collaborative Leadership									
Collaborative Leadership		Collaborative Leadership in Practice				Impacts of Collaborative Leadership in Schools			
Background & Theory	Literature on Collaborative Educational Leaders	Characteristics	Leading by Convening	Professional Learning Communities	Perceptions of Collaboration	Teacher Efficacy	Impact on Stakeholder Groups	School Improvement	Special Education
Bolden (2011)	Angelle (2007)	Wheatley (2010)	Cashman et. all (2014)	DuFour (2004)	Black (2010)	Dauksas & white (2010)	Fusarelli, et. all (2011)	Hauge & Vedoy (2014)	DeMatthews (2015)
Kelley (2005)	Kotter (2012)	McAdamis (2010)	Held & Lawrence (2016)	Anfara (2012)	Butler (2007)	Johnson (2006)	Brazer, Rich, & Ross (2010)	Hallinger & Heck (2010)	Foster (2006)
Senge (1990)	Gano-Phillips, et. all (2011)	Jappinen (2014)		DeMatthews (2014a)	Tesfaw (2014)	Sveiby & Simons (2002)	Bray, et. all (2014)	Abbott & McKnight (2010)	
Kotter (2012)	Fullan (2001)	Fullan (2001)		Barton & Stepanek (2012)	Padilla (2009)	Margolin (2012)		Duyar, et. all (2012)	
Scharmer (2009)	Hallinger (2013)	Padilla (2009)		DeMatthews (2014c)		Russell (2008)		Ohlson (2009)	
Puccio, Mance, & Murdock (2011)	Nir & Hameiri (2013)	West (2010)		Linder, Post, & Calabrese (2012)		Fullan (2001)			
	Gkolia, et. all (2006)	Gano-Phillips, et. all (2011)		Ning, Lee, & lee (2015)		Ohlson (2009)			
		Kramer & Crespy (2011)		Thomton & Cherrington (2014)					
				Annointte-Young, et. all (2013)					
				DeMatthews (2014b)					

Appendix B: Principal Interview Protocol

1. What is your experience in education?
2. What do you feel is your role as a principal of an elementary school?
3. How would you describe your own leadership style?
4. What does collaborative leadership mean to you?
5. What do you believe makes a collaborative leadership environment?
6. How did you establish the context of a collaborative environment?
7. What is your experience with collaborative leadership?
8. How do you establish genuine relationships with teachers in order to implement an effective collaboration?
9. What relationship characteristics need to exist for effective collaboration?
10. How have you established collaboration within your school community?
11. What have the responses to collaboration been from your staff?
12. What needs to exist within your school for effective collaboration?
13. What are the obstacles to collaboration?
14. Describe some experiences that you have had with leadership that lead you to choose collaboration.
15. If you were an outsider coming into a building, how would you know if it is a collaborative leadership environment?
16. Have you received any resistance to collaboration? If so, why do you feel is the cause?

Appendix C: Teacher Focus-Group Interview Protocol

1. What do you feel is the role of an elementary principal?
2. How would you describe the current leadership style?
3. What does collaborative leadership mean to you?
4. What do you believe makes a collaborative leadership environment?
5. How you feel that the context of a collaborative environment has been established?
6. What is your experience with collaboration?
7. How has collaboration been supported?
8. What relationship characteristics need to exist for effective collaboration?
9. How has collaboration been established within your school community?
10. How do you feel about collaboration?
11. What needs to exist within your school for effective collaboration?
12. What are the obstacles to collaboration?
13. If you were an outsider coming into a building, how would you know if it is a collaborative leadership environment?